Edited by
KATE HEXT *and*
ALEX MURRAY

DECADENCE

in the Age of Modernism

VISIT…

Decadence in the Age of Modernism

Hopkins Studies in Modernism
Douglas Mao, *Series Editor*

Decadence in the Age of Modernism

Edited by Kate Hext and Alex Murray

Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore

© 2019 Johns Hopkins University Press
All rights reserved. Published 2019
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Johns Hopkins University Press
2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363
www.press.jhu.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hext, Kate, editor. | Murray, Alex, 1980- editor.
Title: Decadence in the age of Modernism / edited by Kate Hext and Alex Murray.
Description: Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019. | Series: Hopkins studies in Modernism | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018046666 | ISBN 9781421429427 (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 142142942X (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781421429434 (electronic) | ISBN 1421429438 (electronic)
Subjects: LCSH: English literature—20th century—History and criticism. | American literature—20th century—History and criticism. | Decadence (Literary movement) | Modernism (Literature)
Classification: LCC PR478.D43 D43 2019 | DDC 820.9/112—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018046666

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Special discounts are available for bulk purchases of this book. For more information, please contact Special Sales at 410-516-6936 or specialsales@press.jhu.edu.

Johns Hopkins University Press uses environmentally friendly book materials, including recycled text paper that is composed of at least 30 percent post-consumer waste, whenever possible.

Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction 1
Kate Hext and Alex Murray

1 **Dainty Malice: Ada Leverson and Post-Victorian Decadent Feminism** 27
Kristin Mahoney

2 **The Ugly Things of *Salome*** 47
Ellen Crowell

3 **Decadent Paths and Percolations after 1895** 71
Nick Freeman

4 **"A Poetess of No Mean Order": Margaret Sackville, Women's Poetry, and the Legacy of Aestheticism** 89
Joseph Bristow

5 **The Queer Drift of Firbank** 118
Ellis Hanson

6 **Burning the Candle at Both Ends: Edna St. Vincent Millay's Decadence** 135
Sarah Parker

7 Woolf and Joyce, Barnes and Beckett: The Legacy of Decadence in Major Modernist Novels 161
Vincent Sherry

8 "The Woodland Whose Depths and Whose Heights Were Pan's": Swinburne and Lawrence, Decadence and Modernism 179
Howard J. Booth

9 The Naughtiness of the Avant-Garde: Donald Evans, Claire Marie, and *Tender Buttons* 197
Douglas Mao

10 The Queerness of Being 1890 in 1922: Carl Van Vechten and the New Decadence 229
Kirsten MacLeod

11 A Decadent Dream Deferred: Bruce Nugent and the Harlem Renaissance's Queer Modernity 251
Michèle Mendelssohn

Contributors 277
Index 281

Acknowledgments

This book emerged out of a conference we organized in April 2015, titled "Aestheticism and Decadence in the Age of Modernism" and held at the Institute of English Studies, University of London. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the over one hundred speakers and delegates at that event, with particular thanks to our keynote and plenary speakers: Nick Freeman, Kristin Mahoney, Michèle Mendelssohn, and Vincent Sherry. Their ideas and sheer enthusiasm for post-Wildean decadence made us realize that this chronically underexplored area of literary studies was not merely a niche interest of ours.

The path from conference to collection was smoothed with the indefatigable support, care, and patient advice of Douglas Mao, the series editor of Hopkins Studies in Modernism. We also take this opportunity to give our sincere gratitude to Johns Hopkins University Press, in particular our wonderful editor Catherine Goldstead, who is the model of editorial acuity. Closer to home we would like to thank those whose support has kept us sane: Sinéad Moynihan and Aidan Foster-Carter.

This page intentionally left blank

Decadence in the Age of Modernism

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

Kate Hext and Alex Murray

On Sunday, 16 August 1925, William Faulkner spent the day sightseeing in Paris. He had been in the city for only three days, and there was a great deal on his itinerary. He took a boat trip down the Seine, walked through the Bois de Boulogne, visited the Arc de Triomphe, people watched on the Champs-Élysées, was struck by the grandeur of Notre Dame, and observed Parisians at their leisure in the Luxembourg Gardens. He also visited Père Lachaise, writing to his mother that he "particularly went to see Oscar Wilde's tomb, with a bas-relief by Jacob Epstein."[1] That Faulkner undertook a pilgrimage to Wilde's tomb is hardly surprising; like so many modernists, he drew deeply from the literature and culture of aestheticism and decadence, whether it be in his early sub-Swinburnian poetry and short stories or in his Beardsley-inspired illustrations in the *Mississippian* (1916–25).

Yet Faulkner's trip was not the nostalgic or ironic homage to Wilde we might imagine. Epstein's controversial monument, unveiled in August 1914, was representative of the "New Sculpture" and worked to represent Wilde as self-consciously modern, looking forward to the twentieth century, the birth of which had coincided with his death in 1900.[2] For Faulkner, as for Epstein, Wilde was indeed a modern—his contemporary, even. Faulkner's youthful interest in, and emulation of, figures from the British fin de siècle exerted a lifelong influence over his creative work that is all but lost in the critical contexts built up around him since. While he vanquished the nymphs and fauns of Algernon Charles Swinburne from Yoknapatawpha County, the decadents continued to haunt his imagination: a funereal setting in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) "resembled a garden scene by the Irish poet, Wilde," while a "magnolia-faced woman" has been "created by and for the darkness whom the artist Beardsley might have dressed."[3] These allusions betoken the more deeply interfused influence of decadent style in Faulkner's digressive, para-

tactic, subjunctive prose style, which often echoes the rhetorical excesses of Swinburne or Walter Pater.

For Faulkner and his contemporaries, the influence of writers associated with the decadent movement as it manifested in Great Britain and France is at turns conscious and accidental—sometimes celebrated, more often blushingly denied. The present volume is about English-speaking writers of Faulkner's era and the ways in which decadent aesthetics and principles shaped their work. The haunting presence of fin-de-siècle decadence in the twentieth century is diffuse—a fact that goes some way to explaining why it is still neglected by critics. The influence of its figures, poetics, and principles evolved into the work of the high modernists at the same time as a new generation reworked these into the camp, queer sibling of high modernist poetics. Even articulating the phenomenon in this way gives a misleading impression of parallel tracks, neat and clearly defined. In truth it was no such thing: the persistence—or insistence—of decadence in the new century is mixed up and messy, inconsistent and hidden by a literary history that has chosen to elide the kind of miscreants who were so often the most creative reinterpreters of the decadent tradition. As they begin to bring this decadent afterlife to light, the essays collected here argue that critical narratives of early twentieth-century literature have been complicit in the erasure of decadence after Wilde. The clear demarcation of decadence and modernism must be rewritten to understand that they are not diametrically opposed but mutually constitutive and thoroughly implicated in each other's aesthetic development and textual politics. When we begin to recognize this, we can begin to reconceive the troubled relationship between the age of modernism and its recent past.

Quelling Decadence

Decadence has long been elided by modernism in the narrative of twentieth-century literature. The initial quelling of decadence in literary studies, though, came from within, and it came early. Arthur Symons gave one of the most influential assessments of the new literature of France and its manifestations in England in "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893), only to recant a few years later when, in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), he declared decadence to be a "half a mock-interlude" that "diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation."[4] There is an element of opportunism in Symons's demotion of decadence to a trivial fad; it captures the spirit of conservative backlash against

decadence following the Wilde trials. At the same time, his assessment in *The Symbolist Movement* reflects the first of a series of apparent schisms in the age. That first one, caused by Wilde's imprisonment in 1895, was exacerbated by the turn of the new century. But there would be more: the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, the Great War (1914–18), and the 1929 Wall Street Crash. With each, the world of fin-de-siècle decadence became more remote, or so it has often seemed.

In 1928 A. J. A. Symons, himself a great chronicler of decadence, concluded that the Great War had cleaved his age apart from that of Wilde, Arthur Symons, Lionel Johnson, and the Rhymers' Club, who long ago gathered in the Cheshire Cheese to recite their languorous verses: "Freed from the restrictions and hypocrisies against which they strove, we are irked by the despairing clamour of their revolt; exhausted by the greatest war in history, we are in no mood for merely introspective woe; absorbed in our own time we forget the problems by which these young men were perturbed. In the twilit end of the nineteenth century there seemed no answer to a bleak materialism."[5] Symons was hardly alone in his belief that the "introspective woe" of the lyric poets of the 1890s was anachronistic in a world that bore witness to the savagery of the Somme. In his oddly excited essay, "War and Literature" (1914), Edmund Gosse agreed, reflecting that as a result of the war "our wish for indulgence of every sort, our laxity of manners, our wretched sensitiveness to personal inconvenience, these are suddenly lifted before us in their true guise as the spectres of national decay."[6] This is a thinly veiled attack on the decadent movement, parodied and written off here, by a man who was once an intimate of its central figures. Meanwhile, Charles Ricketts, the artist who designed and illustrated Wilde's *The Sphinx* (1894) and designed the King's Hall production of his *Salome* (1906), mourned the loss of this romantic, cosmopolitan past. In November 1914, as he speculated as to whether Bruges would fall to the invading German army, he lamented, "I feel already old beyond belief, a survivor from the romantic epoch which welcomed all Art manifestations and discovered 'that approximate eternity' which we can compass by familiarity with the past."[7]

In these early decades of the new century a burgeoning business in memoirs, biographies, and fictionalizations of the fin de siècle, as well as the publication of selected works by its main protagonists, solidified the impression that decadence belonged to an increasingly distant past, even as they ensured its judiciously edited presence in the imaginative life of the period. Take, for instance, the posthumous presence of Pater in the literary world.

Pater died in July 1894, and for some years there was no book-length biography, an understandable fact given the difficulties posed by a lack of knowledge about his life beyond its austere outer shell and an abundance of concern regarding some of that which was known. Then things changed: the biographies of Pater published between 1900 and the outbreak of the Great War include Ferris Greenslet's *Walter Pater* (1903), A. C. Benson's *Walter Pater* (1906), Thomas Wright's *The Life of Walter Pater* (1907), and Edward Thomas's *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* (1913). These works were infused with memoir and anecdote, especially about the older Pater, with the danger of his hedonistic ideas and homoeroticism kept beyond the margins. Pater's violent, homoerotic short story "Apollo in Picardy" (1893) alone is enough to show that in truth he never metamorphosed into the dear sweet old man depicted by these biographies. It was the biographers themselves who almost successfully straightened him out into a conventional-looking man of letters.

The cosy nostalgia that defines these portraits of Pater is evident in broader studies of the 1890s too. The first comprehensive history, Holbrook Jackson's *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1913), was a portrait of a period that already seemed distant enough to treat as a sort of cultural caprice, largely influenced by France, and ultimately quite alien to the British temperament. After all, decadence originated in France. The term was first used in a literary context in 1834 by the critic Désiré Nisard, who, in *Études de moeurs et de critique sur les poètes latins de la décadence*, suggested an analogy between contemporary Romantic poets such as Victor Hugo and the writers of the Roman decadence. The analogy stuck and, when in 1857 Charles Baudelaire published *Les Fleurs du mal*, the rejection of classical forms in Victor Hugo's verse gave way to an erotic, violent, artificial poetic. Later French writers such as Paul Verlaine and Joris-Karl Huysmans would embrace Baudelaire's ennui, and by the 1870s Parisian decadence could be seen as a literary movement with recognizable forms and themes.[8] Interest in this new development in French literature was felt early in England, with Swinburne writing a strident defense of Baudelaire in 1862. Bearing this in mind, decadence could be historicized as the product of a particular Francophilia that, after the Great War, seemed incongruous and anachronistic. And it often was. Like *The Eighteen Nineties*, Bernard Muddiman's *The Men of the Nineties* (1920), W. B. Yeats's *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), and Richard Le Gallienne's *The Romantic '90s* (1925) turn the cosmopolitan decadent tradition into a historical fact,

bounded by high Victorianism on the one side and the new century on the other.

With the literatures of decadence safely quarantined in the 1890s, the decadent movement became a convenient point of departure for those who were "making it new." In his essay entitled "Arnold and Pater" (1930), Arthur Symons's acolyte T. S. Eliot disingenuously rejected Pater and the movement that dare not speak its name, famously declaring that he did not believe that his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) had "influenced a single first-rate mind of a later generation." Pater's dictum of "art for art's sake," Eliot continued, "impressed itself upon a number of writers in the 'nineties, and propagated some confusion between life and art which is not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives."[9] Eliot's moralizing denigration of Pater and the movement he spawned is clearly homophobic. Elsewhere it is also tinged with misogyny. Eliot saw the cultivation of connoisseurship promoted by the aesthetic writers of the late Victorian period as facilitating a troubling democratization of male, heteronormative culture, and a deleted passage from the first draft of *The Waste Land* (1922) bemoans,

> Women grown intellectual grow dull,
> And lose the mother wit of natural trull.
> Fresca was baptised in a soapy sea
> Of Symonds—Walter Pater—Vernon Lee.[10]

By 1922 Eliot's overt hostility to decadence was shared by Ezra Pound. Having moved to London in 1908, Pound attempted to launch himself on the literary scene with *A Lume Spento* (1908). It was a volume that wore its decadent influences very clearly indeed, whether those be with stylistic affinities in poems such as "The Cry of the Eyes," or with direct reference in "In Tempore Senectutis" (subtitled "An Anti-stave for Dowson"), or with an explicit announcement of affiliation in "The Decadence," which opens with "Tarnished we! / Tarnished! Wastrels all! / And yet the art goes on, the *art* goes on."[11] Pound was far more willing than Eliot to invoke decadent writers throughout his career, but he would regularly paint them as relics from a bygone age. In *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), for instance, he recounts his own attempts to track down the remaining decadents in London, in particular Victor Plarr, who becomes the thinly fictionalized

> M. Verog, out of step with the decade,
> Detached from his contemporaries,

Neglected by the young,
Because of these reveries.[12]

The pathetic figure of Plarr/Verog as a man out of time should not be misconstrued as an absolute antipathy toward the decadent tradition. Pound was occasionally willing to concede the achievements of decadents. His respect for Symons was, however, seemingly dependent on the older poet remaining as a revenant figure, noting that in the '20s Symons "reappeared as if still in the land of '95, writing still of Javanese Dancers, and certainly very much 'out of the movement.' "[13]

The disavowals of decadence offered by Eliot and his kind were taken up with alacrity by the (mainly) men who institutionalized English literature in newly formed university departments on either side of the Atlantic. There are, of course, serious ideological differences between decadent texts, with their close links to biography, and the principles of New Criticism. That those biographies were ridden with licentious details and effeminate men made the gulf between them irreconcilable. F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards, and René Wellek either willfully ignored Wilde or decisively dismissed him and the decadent movement.[14] In 1960 Harvard professor of English Harry Levin framed modernism in opposition to the literature of the 1890s. With a sweeping appraisal of European literature from Romanticism onward, Levin declared that "a revolutionary generation tends to be succeeded by a reactionary one; to put it less politically and more psychologically, there seems to be a cyclic oscillation between tough and tender minds." There were no prizes for guessing how this played out when the literature of Joyce and Eliot was juxtaposed to that of Wilde and Ernest Dowson, the schema helping "to explain the phenomenon of the hard-boiled Nineteen-Twenties, recoiling as it were from the softness of the *fin du siècle* [*sic*]."[15] Typical of his generation, Levin's earnest criticism defines critical merit in such a way as to render decadence without value: criticism for him is not "soft," with the implication of femininity, but hard and virile, recoiling—no less—from the implied moral transgressions of those earlier literary reprobates.

Levin's vision of "hard-boiled" modernism was further consolidated by Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971). Never before, not even by the participants themselves, had the modernist narrative been told with so much hyperbole and heroism. As Kenner announced in his acknowledgments, "this book was planned as an X-ray moving picture of how our epoch was extricated from the *fin de siècle*."[16] This process of extrication was for Kenner

facilitated by a hardening of verse, a self-conscious move away from lyric melody and musicality: "no sound, not even the sound of the piano, nothing but the artisticness gathering up its skirts, would be said to sponsor the verse all England's flatbed presses were emitting, 1890, 1910, et seq."[17] The taint of prissy effeminacy was to be violently, triumphantly removed from verse by the men of 1914, to be replaced by a cold, precise, sculptural poetics of masculinity. Kenner's triumphant triumvirate—Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis—is clearly a woefully limited iteration of modernism. As Peter Nicholls has noted, the illusory antitheses between decadence and modernism begin to break down if we move beyond Kenner's vision of the latter to a conception of modernism that can include Mina Loy, H.D., and Gertrude Stein. This expanded version of modernism operates in close dialogue with decadent style: it "*appropriated* the linguistic opacity and psychic density of a decadent aesthetics, not with a view to self-destruction, but as a means to reject an imaginary coherence of the self which these writers understood as purely conventional or ideological."[18]

Decadence Today

Today it is an old canard that we have yet to acknowledge the place of decadent literature in the canon of modern literature. Over twenty years ago, Chris Baldick quite rightly complained that this was no longer true.[19] It is even less true today. In spite of Levin, Kenner, and the many critics who shared their views, the uneven critical history of the decadent movement has largely been one of recovery since the 1960s. At times, certainly, this narrative of recovery may have seemed painfully slow, but it has been recovery nonetheless,[20] and one greatly helped since the late 1980s by the influence of Queer Criticism and Gay Studies. It has resulted in numerous reevaluations of Wilde and other figures associated with the decadent movement and several major studies more recently on the false dichotomy between decadence and modernism. Beginning with Perry Meisel's *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (1980) and consolidated with David Weir's landmark *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (1995), a small but growing critical field has begun to deconstruct the modernist distancing of decadence, while also beginning to chart the resilience of the decadent aesthetic in the age of modernism.[21]

Until recently, though, these spirited attempts to invigorate a discussion of decadence in the twentieth century have floundered as catalysts for any

broader reassessment of literary history in this period, without the critical mass of scholarship from decadence studies to support such an endeavor or a receptive audience in modernist studies to listen. Two signal works—Vincent Sherry's *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2014) and Kristin Mahoney's *Literature and Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (2015)—have made significant advances in reevaluating the narrative of decadence after the 1895 watershed. The recent turn in modernist studies, in which "modernism" is multiplied to modernisms, encompassing a more diverse range of styles and periods, is a game changer. It inaugurates a thrilling heterogeneity in which the straight lines of literary history are bent, queered, with the attendant liberalization of both what modernism is and "its" relation to literary history. Among the manifold modernisms now in play—camp modernism, queer modernism, global modernism, rural modernism, granular modernism, intermodernism—we might add another: decadent modernism. We might, but should we, given that both of these terms are fraught in their respective fields, haunted with a suspicion that they impose a simplistic unity on what were radically heterogeneous moments of literary dynamism? There are decadent modernists—Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Djuna Barnes, perhaps—but not all those we call decadent in the early twentieth century are usefully encompassed by the moniker of modernism. It is for this reason that the focus of this collection is not on modernism, but on the "age" that it tends to label in literary studies. While a number of essays collected here address the influence of decadence on "high modernists" such as Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, Stein, and Beckett, others look at early twentieth-century writers who have been refused a position at the modernist table by virtue of their decadence.

The question of decadent modernism opens out into a larger concern for this collection and beyond it for studies of decadence in the twentieth century. For if the task now is to move toward a wide-ranging appreciation of how decadence shaped the period we still habitually think of as "modernist,"[22] the main difficulty is how. The current collection sets out to confront the dizzying multiplicity of decadence in the early twentieth century head-on. It attempts, as far as possible, to account for why the decadent elements that made their way into the twentieth century cannot be captured in a formulating phrase, convenient though that would be. While this collection discusses the continuities between decadence and modernism, one of its main aims is to initiate a broader discussion of decadence in the twentieth century. The point is this: the place of twentieth-century decadence in lit-

erary history is not contingent on the bits of it that influenced high modernism. This part of its afterlife is important, but, as Marion Thain has pointed out, reading decadence through the lens of high modernism alone has a narrowing effect; it effectively selects elements of decadence that fit into a teleology ending in modernism.[23] Alongside the literary phenomenon we imperfectly call modernism, decadence persisted as a distinct tradition that cannot easily or desirably be brought under the umbrella of modernism, or if it is, then we are left with a risky simplification. Authors such as Carl Van Vechten and Edna St. Vincent Millay, who are considered in this collection, are examples of how the lens of modernism can operate, often unconsciously, to deselect authors from the annals of literary history. It would be possible now to rehabilitate these figures by bringing them into the capacious fold of modernism, but this move may fail to capture the force of their interventions as they evolve self-consciously out of decadence. What the essays in the current collection show is that it is time now not only to revisit the composition of the modernist canon, which is being done, but also to address literary works that are not within (and should not be forced into) that canon.

All of which begs the question of what precisely we mean when we talk about "decadence." The semblance of a definition only holds so far, and its elusive nature is partly to blame for its position at the peripheries of criticism. Since the 1890s, critics have floundered as they have attempted to adequately articulate the aesthetics and politics of the decadent sensibility in art and literature. When Arthur Symons wrote decadence off as a "half a mock-interlude" and Pound parodied decadence in his poetry—to take just two cases noted above—are they even talking about the same "decadence"? Quite possibly not. As an article in 1896 put it, "What actually constitutes the philosophy called decadent must remain a moot point. There will be no agreeing about it, for what is heterodoxy to-day becomes orthodoxy to-morrow."[24] The difficulties of providing a universal definition served the detractors of decadence well, helping to facilitate the creation of a bogeyman labeled "decadence" and associated somehow with Wilde, degeneracy, and sexual deviancy. This is not to say that problems of defining decadence are intractable. In our view, and in the work of the essays gathered here, they coalesce around two substantive issues: the slipperiness of the word "decadence," and the plurality of literary styles and social politics of those who have become part of a canon of decadent literature.

First, there is the issue that faces all studies of decadence in literature

and the arts: this movement—for it was a movement, though not only a movement—is an irreducibly amorphous phenomenon, with multiple defining features in France and Great Britain. "Decadence" is, according to Richard Gilman, who speaks for many critics of the period, "an unstable word and concept whose significations and weights continually change in response to shifts in moral, social and cultural attitudes."[25] The term itself does not help: it is slippery, and there is a crucial slippage between the evolution of "decadence" and that which it encompasses when appropriated as a moniker at the fin de siècle. A sixteenth-century French import, the word "decadence" is more or less a synonym for decline. It was taken up by conservative cultural critics in France, and then in England in the latter half of the nineteenth century, to express fears about the deterioration of traditional moral, religious, and cultural values that they perceived to be under threat from modernity in its various guises. "Decadence" was then regularly used in a wholly pejorative fashion to attack all things "new" (the New Woman, the New Art, the New Journalism, etc.). Writers and artists who adopted the term as a badge did so as a means of challenging the moralizing connotations of the term itself. In doing so, they were reappropriating the notion of a civilization in decline to revel in its exhaustion and decay.

Turning from the term "decadence" to an empirical investigation of the literature that is labeled as such, it becomes clear that decadence in literature manifests as a phenomenon far broader than the central definition of decline would indicate. A web of interests, styles, and attitudes connects these decadents, one that in large part stems from the decline of—or, more precisely, defection from—the values embodied by the Empire and the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. In the British tradition, these authorities are superseded by beliefs in "art for art's sake," developed from aestheticism; a fierce Romantic individualism; and the pursuit of sensation for its own sake. These common grounds show themselves most obviously in the literary styles through which fin-de-siècle decadents foregrounded the radical revision of values at stake in their works. Certainly the literary forms here are varied: Wilde's style, for instance, is characterized by paradox and veiled meaning, encased in post-Socratic dialogue; Arthur Symons's poems are conceived as fleeting impressions with self-consciously contrived meter and rhyme; the eroticism of "Michael Field" (Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper) is defined by Sapphic fragments and Bacchic imagery; Baron Corvo's prose is archaic and ornamental in style. It would be a misnomer to say that there is a simple and stable taxonomy of decadent style, and even

more problematic to declare a singular stylistic influence on the literature of the early years of the twentieth century.[26] Like all literary movements, decadence is a mongrel, bearing traces of various literary forebears. Most notably, its development out of aestheticism is contentious and uncertain. We say "uncertain" advisedly, because the borders between them are not fixed (or indeed fixable): if it is possible to agree, provisionally, that what delineates decadence from aestheticism is that underlying sense of decline and desire for literary revolution, it must still be admitted that a number of figures remain on the cusp between the two, such as Swinburne, while others, such as Pater, are subject to debate, and others, like Arthur Machen, dabble in decadent ideas and styles in some works and not in others. What holds the fin-de-siècle decadents listed above together stylistically is their rejection of the conventional narrative structures of the triple-decker novel or the epic poem and a wholesale revolt against realism and the values it encapsulates. Their fragmented forms, overwrought styles, and focus on the fleeting and erotic without judgment signal a decline—perhaps. More than this, they herald an unprecedented awareness of a new turn in literary history.

The second problem of defining decadence pertains particularly to a book like this one: decadence after the fin de siècle is even more difficult to detect and ultimately define than it was at the fin de siècle. Some of this uncertainty is betokened by the fact that writers in this volume use different terms for what we are talking about; for Kristin Mahoney it is "post-Victorian decadence," while Kirsten MacLeod takes up the term used by contemporary reviewers of Van Vechten's first novel, "the new decadence." The former encapsulated the conscious looking back evident in much decadent work of the twentieth century, including Ada Leverson, on whom Mahoney's essay focuses. The latter emphasizes the renewal of decadent ideas essential to the forms of other 1920s' decadents, such as MacLeod's central figure, Van Vechten.

Decadence was not a movement as such after the imprisonment of Wilde; that much is clear. Not only did the central figures of the 1890s' decadent movement disperse (Le Gallienne), die (Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Johnson, Dowson), or merely defect (Symons, Yeats), but their inheritors also heterogeneously and geographically scattered. These facts leave us to come to terms with how to conceptualize such an anachronistic, diverse literary phenomenon. Put another way, what does decadence mean when it is not written by the key figures of the original movement or composed at the fin de siècle? We find that decadence in the twentieth-century context is still

rooted in a commitment to sensuality for its own sake and the supremacy of the Romantic individual, and it takes shape with liberal borrowing and development of various styles from Wilde and company. Moreover, the primary writers discussed in this collection looked consciously back to Wilde and other central figures in the original movement as literary pioneers or exemplars of nonnormative sexual identity. This is important because it means that the term "decadence" applied to writers of the twentieth century is not abstract. These elements are most often brought together in a defiant, vivid assertion of the sexual freedoms promised by a life lived for sensation alone—albeit an assertion made under the cover of suggestiveness. The force is often quite different, combining a willful retrospection that contains within it a rejection of the contemporary world and a critique of its forms. But the heterogeneity that makes decadence difficult to define is also fundamental to its definition; the chameleon character of decadence means that it manifested itself in a range of forms: from Woolf's exploration of empire (as explored here by Vincent Sherry) to Richard Bruce Nugent's articulation of a queer African American identity in 1920s Harlem (as Michèle Mendelssohn examines in her essay).

The Queer Vitality of Decadence

If the fact that decadence persisted, elegantly, queerly, and tenaciously, into the twentieth century is accepted, at least provisionally, the next question is why. The essays collected in the present volume illustrate that as the decadent movement became sublimated into an amorphous spirit of decadence after Wilde's imprisonment, its tropes and poetics were taken up and developed to find new expressions for the modern dissident. For the main thread that draws together these twentieth-century innovators in the decadent tradition is their defiant place outside the dominant culture and their use of decadence to critique prevailing ideologies of politics, gender, and sexuality.

Even while the violence unleashed on the battlefields of the First World War suggested a decisive break from the gay '90s, many writers quietly returned to decadent aesthetics as an antidote to the carnage. John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* (1921) is haunted by Gustave Flaubert's *La Tentation de saint Antoine* (1874), with the intricate cadences of Flaubert's style, the hypnotic taxonomies, and the lush, oriental eroticism of Flaubert's novel operating as aestheticist escapism for the main protagonist, John Andrews.[27] As he recovered from a sprained ankle in wartime Cairo, E. M. Forster like-

wise found in Huysmans the ultimate fantasy: "Oh the relief of a world which lived for its sensations and ignored the will—the world of des Esseintes! Was it decadent? Yes, and Thank God. Yes; here again was a human being who had time to feel and experiment with his feelings, to taste and smell and arrange books and delicate flowers, and be selfish and himself. The waves of edifying bilge rolled off me, the newspapers ebbed."[28] The decadence of Huysmans was Forster's spirited protest against dirty, common, mechanized, brutal, jingoistic modernity. Reading his account, we are reminded that there was demand for Oscar Wilde in the circulating libraries that operated in the Allied camps of the Great War. Of course, in his own way Forster was not so different from A. J. A. Symons, Gosse, or Ricketts. If he took inspiration from decadence, he managed to do so without displacing the idea that it was a relic from the previous century, mourned but irretrievably gone, revisited only as nostalgic escapism. How annoyed T. S. Eliot would have been, though, had he known that Forster instinctively attached his paper copies of "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to his prized copy of Huysmans's *À Rebours*, seeing them as kindred literary spirits.[29]

At the same time as decadence was being appropriated for cultural nostalgia, there were spectacular moments in which the sexual danger of decadence disrupted the notion of a now-deceased movement. Among these were the Cave of the Golden Calf in London's Soho, the fantastically ridiculous Pemberton-Billing trial, and the trial in Chicago of Ben Hecht and Wallace Smith for their lewd parody of *À Rebours*, *Fantazius Mallare* (1923).[30] In the 1910s and '20s this reinvigorated sensationalism became the most pertinent backdrop to decadence's generative influence on newly emerging literary and artistic cultures on either side of the Atlantic. The generation of writers who were to chronicle the world of the "Bright Young Things" in the 1920s were immersed in those sensual works of decadence at school and university. Offering an extracurricular frisson to young boys (it was usually boys), their most vibrant influence became, as it had been in the 1890s, a countercultural force. Some of the young boys who were introduced to Wilde and the *Yellow Book* outside the classroom at school or university became the wave of writers and artists who revitalized a decadent aesthetic. For them literature of the 1890s inaugurated a new and vital literary age that was, in the 1920s, carrying on the challenges against tradition and convention inaugurated by decadence. One of those most clearly doing this was Osbert Burdett, whose study *The Beardsley Period* (1925) offered a visionary reevaluation of the relationship between decadence and the radical litera-

ture in the early twentieth century. While the majority of those early histories of the 1890s were produced by those intimately involved in its events, Burdett, a dandy born in 1885, was inspired by, rather than a product of, the energy of decadence. Implicitly arguing against the kind of decisive historical breaks that helped to mummify decadence, he asserts that the works of decadent writers were in fact far more popular after the war than before: "Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since Wilde died in Paris in 1900. The War, with all its changes in our preoccupations, has intervened. But for those susceptible to it the interest in the nineties is unabated. On the potency of their odd elixir the War has produced no visible effect, and this invites us to inquire how far they may have stood for something more enduring than we thought, and if their chosen triviality may not have a more vital principle than the seriousness against which it was directed."[31] That "vital principle" lurking within the "triviality" of the 1890s was showing glimpses of its energy in the 1920s. Burdett's declaration that it was only an accident of time that James Joyce's *Ulysses* was published in 1922 rather than the 1890s was ludicrous. However, it reminds us how intimately the texts of high modernism are connected with the decadent 1890s and may well reflect Burdett's apprehension of Wildean influences in *Ulysses*.

Burdett himself was part of an informal network of men who in the early years of the twentieth century celebrated homosexual—often pederastic—love, a love they considered the "higher" love (hence Uranian, after Urania the Greek muse of astronomy), a circle that would include many with close connections to decadence, such as the prison and homosexual law reformer George Cecil Ives, who was an associate of Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas. The essays gathered in the present volume share Burdett's understanding of the 1890s as the touchstone for the queer vitality that flourished in the age of modernism, demonstrating the potent impact of decadence on the evolution of queer identity and self-fashioning as writers of the early twentieth century developed new textual strategies to reflect social change. This is not to say that the writers examined in this collection were all progressive—far from it. As Matthew Potolsky has noted, decadent writers cohered into no singular or stable political position. They could veer from the fascism of Gabrielle D'Annunzio, to the violent conservatism of Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), to the idiosyncratic "socialism" of Oscar Wilde. All of these positions, however, coalesce around small, elite communities formed "against the twin pillars of the nineteenth-century bourgeois ascendency: liberalism and nationalism," and there is a significant overlap with "emerging gay and

lesbian subcultures," meaning that "decadence also provided a medium for writers to define communities united by sexual dissidence and nonnormative desires."[32] While the majority of the essays gathered here explore writers who inherit from decadence communities of nonnormative desire, there are, of course, alternative trajectories.

A near contemporary of Wilde's second son, Vyvyan Holland, and Osbert Sitwell at Cambridge, Ronald Firbank matriculated in 1901. He brought his collection of books by Wilde, Dowson, Hubert Crackanthorpe, Beardsley, and Max Beerbohm with him and was often found sitting in his darkened rooms surrounded by altar candles. Aldous Huxley likewise encountered the writing of Wilde and Pater, first at Eton and then more profoundly at Oxford between 1913 and 1916. In his short-lived career as a schoolmaster at Eton he counteracted disruptive students by reading to them, along with his own commentary, the poetry of Verlaine.[33] Later on, like Dos Passos, Forster, or Beerbohm's popular drawings in the 1910s,[34] Huxley had aesthetic and personal reasons for distancing himself from the literature and lifestyles of the 1890s. When he came to fictionalize the lives of the Bloomsbury Set gathered under the patronage of Lady Ottoline Morrell at Garsington Manor in *Crome Yellow* (1921), he drew on the legacy of the 1890s to heighten the satire of an affected aestheticism. Denis Stone, drowsy after a heavy lunch, "felt, like Ernest Dowson, 'a little weary.' He was in the mood to write something rather exquisite and gentle and quietist in tone; something a little droopy and at the same time—how should he put it?—a little infinite."[35] Going up to Oxford a few years later in 1922, Evelyn Waugh found "traditional aesthetes who still survived here and there in the twilight of the 90s."[36] Waugh was to retain a lifelong interest in the literature of the 1890s, with characters such as Ambrose Silk in *Put Out More Flags* (1941) dismissed by the younger generation "as a survival from the *Yellow Book*," yet depicted with a patronizing fondness by Waugh, who increasingly saw himself as a man out of time.[37] Both Waugh and Huxley drew on the dandified pose of the 1890s in their works as they satirized the pretentions of their own periods, and it was in the realm of satire that the legacy of decadence, but also its negative caricature, can be seen in the 1920s. From E. F. Benson's *Mapp and Lucia* novels (1920–39) to Beverley Nichols's *Crazy Pavements* (1927) and Ivy Compton-Burnett's delicate novels of manners from *Pastors and Masters* (1925) on, writers of the interwar period were self-consciously channeling Wilde's social comedies as they lampooned aesthetic living, whether it be bourgeois or bohemian. The generative afterlife uncovered in the essays in

this volume is in some ways more unexpected because it shows the queer poetics of decadence taken up by diverse writers who turned its poetics to new ends.

In the United States, Wildean-cum-Beardsleyesque aesthetics enjoyed a largely unapologetic, even ostentatious, afterlife, which traversed the arts on a scale not seen in Great Britain. Alfred Kazin noted that during this period "the prophets of languor arose from fin de siècle. Oscar Wilde lived again."[38] Strictly speaking, the decadent "prophets" of the United States did not so much live again as come to life for the first time. Decadence peaked later in the United States than in Europe, with interest in its aesthetics growing steadily through figures such as Edgar Saltus and F. Holland Day in the 1890s, but not reaching its height until the late 1910s and '20s. While it often developed as an emulation of French and British models, American decadence could not mine the same tropes of decline and dissipation that characterized those in Europe. As David Weir has outlined, decadence in America was a very different movement from that on the other side of the Atlantic.[39] In the early years of the century aspiring Oscars were as, if not more, likely to be found at select Ivy League universities as at Oxbridge. While a student at Harvard, John Dos Passos contributed derivatively decadent verse to the *Harvard Monthly*; in "From Simonides" the speaker intones, "There's a purple light in the wine cup's heart / Friend, drink deep with me," drawing on Swinburne's and Dowson's lyrics of exhausted eroticism.[40] F. Scott Fitzgerald's autobiographical bildungsroman *This Side of Paradise* (1920), set at his alma mater Princeton, featured copious references to the fin de siècle: Sarah Bernhardt, Verlaine, Swinburne, Wilde, Huysmans, Pater, Théophile Gautier, and Paul Bourget. Amory Blaine's first introduction to the writers of British decadence is framed as an epiphany: "The world became pale and interesting, and he tried hard to look at Princeton through the satiated eyes of Oscar Wilde and Swinburne."[41] These references are only the most discernible signs of the way in which decadence exerted a profound influence on the generations that followed. Once the 1920s had come to an abrupt end with the financial crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, Fitzgerald would recall his decadent-inspired New York with nostalgic fondness: "When bored we took our city with a Huysmans-like perversity. . . . For us the city was inevitably linked up with Bacchic diversions, mild or fantastic."[42]

Fitzgerald's interest in decadence underscores the fact that the perversity and Bacchic revelry revived from 1890s decadence were not the preserve of

queer literature. The freedom of self-styling and sexual promiscuity granted by the hedonistic principles at the heart of decadence were taken up with alacrity by self-defined aesthetes of other persuasions. In this regard, the prolific Ben Hecht drew self-consciously both on Arthur Symons's and Arthur Machen's decadence—of pleasure for its own sake in the shadows of the backstreets—and on the Chicago pulp fiction published in H. L. Mencken's pioneering magazine *The Black Mask* (from 1920). Hecht's short stories and poems in the *Little Review* and *Chicago Daily News* weave their motifs, styles, and principles of fiction together into a hard-boiled portrait of the straight, male decadent and his orientalized female lovers in modern urban America:

> A tiny shimmering courtesan
> Dressed in red spangles,
> Weaves a monotonous thread of painted rubies
> Through the stagnant curtains of her room.
> Stifling under faint rags,
> A dumb enchanted nightingale
> Tosses in droll anguish,
> Dreaming of the sapphire roses and the crystal fringe and the topaz silks
> That were her lovers.[43]

Hecht's Symonsian preoccupation with nostalgic prostitutes, seen in fragmented moments, would evolve into his vision of would-be aesthetes on the busy Chicago streets. Walking down the street is typically rewritten as a Dionysian "carnival" of carnal desire in "Dog Eat Dog," with Hecht breathlessly describing "the paganism of women's buttocks moving under adroit silks": "Here under the tall sunny buildings with their polished windows, here walled by the luxurious dignity of their great rectangular faces, what a saturnalian rape were possible. What a dancing and a shouting and a rolling about with the Tom-Tom of the traffic hammering out its quick, delirious monotone."[44] Still, Chicago would never be the sensual playground that London and Paris had once seemed to be. In Hecht's hard-boiled rewriting, the ideal of decadent pleasure is almost always impinged upon by the nagging responsibilities of family and work. This is a decadence that finds reality sadly wanting, and which signals some of the numerous inherent tensions between living life for sensual pleasure and family—or any straight, salaried—life.

Understandably, for many other contemporaries of Fitzgerald and Hecht, the literature of Wilde, Huysmans, and others offered a vision of another, queer world. Wilde and decadence became in the twentieth century the

"apogee of gay experience and expression," and an interest in the 1890s was often a means to find queer community and kinship.[45] This sense of community operated in pockets across Great Britain and America, and it was particularly vibrant in Manhattan. In 1915 and 1916 the Greenwich Village raconteur Guido Bruno published *Bruno's Weekly*, a little paper that placed Oscar Wilde front and center. The paper included "The Story of Oscar Wilde's Life and Experience in Reading Gaol by His Warder," previously unpublished letters by Wilde, and articles on his visit to America, among other related material. The paper was not merely a vehicle for Wilde hagiography; for young queer American modernists it was an outlet for their emerging aesthetic. The Beardsleyesque pen drawings of a young reporter and short story writer, Djuna Barnes, graced the cover, and it was one of the first outlets for the creative journalism that began her career. It was also Bruno who published, "from his garret on Washington Square" (as all Bruno publications announced), Barnes's collection of eight erotically decadent poems, *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915). In the newspaper articles she wrote in the mid-teens Barnes often provided intimate observations of the exotic lives of Greenwich Villagers, conjuring up the heady mix of poverty and aestheticism that characterized bohemian Manhattan, where "blue and yellow candles pouring their hot wax over things in ivory and jade" illuminated a "copy of Rogue at a low table open at Mina Loy's poem" and "an edition of Oscar Wilde soiled by socialistic thumbs."[46] The grubby edition of Wilde alongside Mina Loy's poetry perfectly encapsulates the queer commingling of decadence with modernism in Greenwich Village of the teens. It was this bohemian world that relocated to Paris in the 1920s, and of which Barnes provided the most striking evocation in *Nightwood* (1936), a novel that, as Robin Blyn has argued, updates the decadent tropes of the fin de siècle as a counterpoint for the emergence of fascism in the 1930s.[47]

Like Barnes, Hart Crane found an outlet for his nascent queer modernism in *Bruno's Weekly*. In 1916, his debut poem, "C33," named after Wilde's cell number in Reading Gaol, explored the interplay of desire and artifice that had characterized the Irish poet's life and work:

> He has woven rose-vines
> About the empty heart of night,
> And vented his long mellowed wines
> Of dreaming on the desert white
> With searing sophistry.[48]

In 1918 he would write a letter, published in the *Little Review*, declaring that "'decadence' is something much talked about, and sufficiently misconstrued to arouse interest in the works of any fool. Any change in form, viewpoint or mannerism can be so abused by the offending party."[49] Yet in his short career Crane would return to the "empty heart of night" that characterized decadent desire, for it was in the darkness under Brooklyn Bridge that he would seek the fleeting intimacy of the queer encounter that would sustain the ecstatic poetic vision, most fully realized in *The Bridge* (1930). *Bruno's Weekly* was just one of many little magazines that developed what Andrew Thacker has labeled a "post-decadent avant-garde" in America.[50] The fates of these little magazines varied: the *Little Review* became legendary under Margaret Anderson's editorship, combining a decadent aesthetic with Nietzschean ethics, while *Rogue* ran for only a few issues in 1915 but brought together Mina Loy and Wallace Stevens, alongside the great self-promoting decadent dilettante Frank Harris.

Loy's use of decadent style was manifold, with her early periodical publications and sequence of poems *Lunar Baedeker* (1923) drawing on the excessive alliteration and exhausted eroticism that characterized the verse of poets like Dowson and Swinburne. From the title poem in *Lunar Baedeker*, for instance,

> Onyx-eyed Odalisques
> and ornithologists
> observe the flight
> of Eros obsolete.[51]

Loy's obsolete Eros and orientalized concubines recall the perverse ennui of Huysmans's Des Esseintes and the lascivious temptation of Flaubert's Saint Anthony. Yet her eroticism is altogether more modern and defamiliarizing, invoking classical models only to leave them ironized and in fragments. Likewise, as Cassandra Laity has argued, H.D. would find in the legacies of the British fin de siècle an alternative to the "male modernist flight from Romantic 'effeminacy' and 'personality,'" embracing instead the "cult of the demonic femme fatale and that of the aesthetic androgyne" found in Swinburne and Pater.[52]

The examples of Loy, Barnes, H.D., and Crane indicate the ways in which decadence became germinal to the development of queer poetics that sits alongside modernism. At the same time, decadence began to evolve into another new language of sexual dissidence: camp. In "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964),

Susan Sontag first alluded to this evolution with her gnomic analogies between camp aesthetics and Oscar Wilde's aphoristic speech. The priority of style, theatricality, aestheticism, and parody that are central to Sontag's account of camp style combine a multitude of sources, but Wilde is central. His personal dandyism is the foundation of the "homosexual social identity" that would manifest into twentieth-century camp personae such as Noel Coward and Quentin Crisp.[53] Further, Wilde's paradoxical language and commitment to abundant fripperies defined this queer social identity out of a fundamental disconnection between the subjective self and the performance of oneself.[54] As camp became "the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture,"[55] it addressed the more fundamental issue of how to codify an identity that is irrevocably at odds with society. The beautiful, irreverent, extravagant surfaces of camp—surfaces that deny the existence of anything beneath—exert a significant influence on Firbank and Van Vechten. Even more than camp personal style has camp in literature and its links to decadence evaded critical interrogation. In the 1920s it emerges like a theatrical nod and a wink behind the back of high modernism—an affront, almost, to its life-and-death questions. It resurrects the sense of fun in decadent pleasure and gives it a new lease of life now released from any shadow of judgment before God.

The essays that follow intend to offer a representative discussion of how decadence evolved in the age of modernism—the most extensive and wide-ranging treatment of decadence after Wilde. Bearing in mind the breadth of the decadent phenomena in the early twentieth century, we make no claim to completion. What we hope is that the essays that follow, together with this introduction, will provide coordinates for bringing to light and understanding twentieth-century decadence, and that they will generate further discussion and debate around the place of decadence in literary history.

Chapters 1–3 look at different aspects of the unfinished business of decadence following Oscar Wilde's imprisonment in 1895. In "Dainty Malice: Ada Leverson and Post-Victorian Decadent Feminism," Kristin Mahoney explores the fiction of Wilde's dear friend, the woman he called "the Sphinx of Modern Life." Beginning with Leverson's short stories in the *Yellow Book* and tracing her novelistic career through the 1900s and 1910s, Mahoney presents Leverson as a liminal figure—in between both decadence and modernism, queer masculinity and New Woman feminism—to show how a unique voice repurposed Wildean wit to feminist effect. In "The Ugly Things of *Salome*," Ellen Crowell focuses on the halting and derided appearance of

Iokanaan's severed head in productions of Wilde's *Salome* between 1896 and 1908. As Crowell explains, the naturalistic appearance of the severed head was controversial in large part because of its contrast with the symbolist aesthetic that defined both these early productions and the simile-laden dialogue of Wilde's play. In examining this appearance, she argues that Salome brings naturalism and symbolism together in a rejection of nineteenth-century realism, rooted in the text of Wilde's play but only realized in production. In "Decadent Paths and Percolations after 1895," Nick Freeman examines the British press's overt hostilities and strategic omissions around decadence in the decades after Wilde's conviction. Decadence, he shows, went underground, as in the Edwardian stories of Saki, which hide their Wilde-inflected humor and homoeroticism in plain sight.

Chapters 4-6 turn to the evolving spirit of decadence that coexisted with—and indeed became the shadow of—high modernism, taking account of how and why the figures on which they focus have been excluded from critical narratives on early twentieth-century literature. Joseph Bristow recovers the life and works of the long-unfashionable aristocratic aesthete-poet, Margaret Sackville, in "'A Poetess of No Mean Order': Margaret Sackville, Women's Poetry, and the Legacy of Aestheticism." This chapter shows how Sackville's prolific career, which spanned from 1900 to 1960 and included the founding of the Poetry Society, was underpinned by the influence of aestheticism, and especially her view that "Art for Art's Sake" had been misinterpreted as "Art for Self's Sake." Her traditionalism is one of the neglected manifestations of aestheticism and decadence in the age of modernism, suffering neglect as a result of being wholly incommensurate with the heroic narrative of experimental modernism. In "The Queer Drift of Firbank," Ellis Hanson considers the paradox of Ronald Firbank, whose presence in the literary landscape of the 1920s masks the fact that critics have seemed irredeemably uncertain about how to make sense of his legacy. Hanson undertakes a queer formalism that demonstrates how Firbank's idiosyncratic prose style uncomfortably unpicks the reader's expectations, with its digressive, innuendo-laden absences a singular experiment in post-Wildean decadence. Sarah Parker's essay, "Burning the Candle at Both Ends: Edna St. Vincent Millay's Decadence," turns to bohemian Manhattan in the '20s and '30s. Parker shows how the "teasing perversity" of Millay's lyrics and monumental translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* derived from decadence a radically feminized reframing of the French poet who had been claimed by Eliot and others as the father of modernism. As Parker argues,

Millay's challenge to the aesthetic and narrative of modernism has been fundamental to her relative marginalization within academic histories of modern poetry.

Chapters 7–9 look at how the tropes of decadence influenced those writers who have long been the standard bearers of modernism. Vincent Sherry's "Woolf and Joyce, Barnes and Beckett: The Legacy of Decadence in Major Modernist Novels" puts decadence into dialogue with high modernism to argue that the novels of these writers reinscribed the temporal imagination of their decadent forebears. Howard J. Booth's "'The Woodland Whose Depths and Whose Heights Were Pan's': Swinburne and Lawrence, Decadence and Modernism" traces D. H. Lawrence's engagement with Swinburne, whom he considered, alongside Shelly, to be "our greatest poet." Challenging the accepted view that Lawrence matured out of a juvenile interest in aestheticist and decadent writers, Booth focuses on his use of Pan and nympholepsy, motifs that Lawrence draws from decadence in order to signal the anti-Cartesian ontology that underpins his work, including *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Douglas Mao's "The Naughtiness of the Avant-Garde: Donald Evans, Claire Marie, and *Tender Buttons*" recovers one of the few clearly identifiable vanishing points between recognizably distinct decadent literature and recognizably distinct modernist literature. Drawing on extensive archival material, Mao discusses how Donald Evans's Claire Marie Press published the spectrum of decadent writing during its brief life, in 1914, ending—perhaps surprisingly—with Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*. Revising later critical accounts that put Stein at odds with the earlier Claire Marie volumes, Mao argues that her first collection represents a further development in sexual freedom practiced in the earlier, overtly post-decadent works and resonates with Evans's later poetry.

Finally, chapters 10 and 11 suggest how the generative potential of decadence in mid- to late 1920s America created the foundations of queer cultures in twentieth-century America. Kirsten MacLeod's "The Queerness of Being 1890 in 1922: Carl Van Vechten and the New Decadence" focuses on how Stein's great friend Van Vechten shaped a new mode of decadent novel in '20s Manhattan—one that was both more popular and far queerer than the recognizably "modernist" experiments in contemporary fiction. With evidence from his novel, *The Blind Bow-Boy*, as well as his extensive personal archives, the essay locates the ways in which Van Vechten develops the characteristics of literary decadence into a queer mode of self-fashioning

and political critique. Michèle Mendelssohn's "A Decadent Dream Deferred: Bruce Nugent and the Harlem Renaissance's Queer Modernity" concentrates on one of the many African American writers photographed by Van Vechten in Harlem: Richard Bruce Nugent. This utterly unapologetic "gay rebel of the Harlem Renaissance," Mendelssohn shows, drew on Wilde, Huysmans, and others to create a "black queer modernity" that took shape at least as much in his life as in his fiction. Piecing his life back together from his personal archives, this essay draws his early work together with his rediscovery in the 1980s.

The essays gathered together in this volume provide ample evidence of the ways in which the creative energy of the 1890s was both an inspiration and a source of anxiety for an age so determined to announce its own innovation and modernity. Decadence and aestheticism were not some embarrassing jejune infatuation to be grown out of, but a complex constellation of stylistic, social, and sexual revolutions that shaped the early years of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. William Faulkner, "To Mrs M.C. Faulkner 16 Aug 1925," in *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 11.

2. Ellen Crowell, "Oscar Wilde's Tomb: *Silence* and the Aesthetics of Queer Memorial," in *BRANCH: Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga, Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. Web.

3. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 157.

4. Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, ed. Matthew Creasy (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 2014), 7.

5. A. J. A. Symons, introduction to *An Anthology of 'Nineties' Verse* (London: Elkin Matthews & Marrot, 1928), xviii.

6. Edmund Gosse, "War and Literature," in *Inter Arma: Being Essays Written in Time of War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 3.

7. Charles Ricketts, "November 23, 1914," in *Self-Portrait: Letters and Journals of Charles Ricketts*, ed. T. Sturge Moore and Cecil Lewis (London: Peter Davies, 1939), 223.

8. For a concise account of the development of French decadence, see David Weir, *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 34–56.

9. T. S. Eliot, "Arnold and Pater," *Bookman*, Sept. 1930, 7.

10. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts* [. . .], ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 41.

11. Ezra Pound, *Collected Early Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1976), 44.

12. Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (London: Ovid Press, 1920), 15.

13. Ezra Pound, "Arthur Symons," *Athenaeum*, 21 May 1920, 664–65.

14. Melissa Knox, *Wilde in the 1990s: The Critic as Creator* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), xiv.

15. Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism?," *Massachusetts Review* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1960): 617.

16. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), xi.

17. Kenner, *Pound Era*, 86.

18. Peter Nicholls, "A Dying Fall? Nineteenth-Century Decadence and Its Legacies," in *Decadence and Danger: Writing, History and the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Tracey Hill (Bath: Sulis Press, 1997), 22.

19. Chris Baldick, "Secular Variations," *TLS*, no. 4718 (3 Sept. 1993): 20.

20. See Richard Kaye's brief but comprehensive list in "Gay Studies/Queer Theory and Oscar Wilde," in *Palgrave Advances in Oscar Wilde Studies*, ed. Frederick S. Roden (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2004), 197–99.

21. David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 1995).

22. Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014); Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015). Others to have muddied the heroic modernist narrative include Ronald Bush, "In Pursuit of Wilde Possum: Reflections on Eliot, Modernism, and the Nineties," *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 3 (2004): 469–85.

23. Marion Thain, "Modernist 'Homage' to the 'Fin de siècle,'" *Yearbook of English Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 22–40.

24. Anonymous, "The Journalism of 'Decadence,'" *Sketch*, 17 June 1896, 324–25.

25. Richard Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979), 19.

26. On the challenges of identifying decadent style, see John R. Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1985); Jason David Hall and Alex Murray, eds., *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle* (Houndsmill, UK: Palgrave, 2013).

27. For example: "He put down the book and closed his eyes. His mind was full of intangible floating glow, like the ocean on a warm night, when every wave breaks into pale flame, and mysterious milky lights keep rising to the surface out of dark waters and gleaming and vanishing." John Dos Passos, *Three Soldiers* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), 143.

28. E. M. Forster, "T. S. Eliot" (1928), in *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Meridian, 1955), 84–85.

29. Forster, "T. S. Eliot," 84. On Eliot's debt to Wilde, see John Paul Riquelme, "T. S. Eliot's Ambiviolences: Oscar Wilde as Masked Precursor," *Hopkins Review* 5, no. 3 (2012): 353–79.

30. On the Pemberton-Billing trial and the Cave of the Golden Calf, see Philip

Hoare, *Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy and the First World War* (London: Duckworth, 1997).

31. Osbert Burdett, *The Beardsley Period: An Essay in Perspective* (New York: Cooper Square, 1969), 5.

32. Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community, from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2013), 10, 6.

33. See Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1974), 89.

34. See Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence*, 33–45.

35. Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (London: Vintage, 2004), 121.

36. Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning* (London: Penguin, 1983), 197.

37. Evelyn Waugh, *Put Out More Flags* (London: Penguin, 1943), 35. On Waugh's relationship to decadence, see Alex Murray, "Decadence Revisited: Evelyn Waugh and the Afterlife of the 1890s," *Modernism/modernity* 22, no. 3 (2015): 593–607.

38. Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1942), 229.

39. David Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature against the Grain* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 2008).

40. John Dos Passos, "From Simonides," *Harvard Monthly*, Jan. 1916, 110.

41. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise* (London: Alma, 2012), 48.

42. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "My Lost City," in *The Crack-Up*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: New Directions, 1945), 23–33, 28. On Fitzgerald's relationship with decadence, see Alex Murray, "The Dance of Death: Fitzgerald and Decadence," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 62, no. 3 (2016): 387–411.

43. Ben Hecht, "The Goldfish in a Bowl," *Little Review* 3, no. 3 (May 1916): 2.

44. Ben Hecht, "Dog Eat Dog," *Little Review* 5, no. 11 (Apr. 1919): 14.

45. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Oscar Wilde, Effeminacy and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994), 3.

46. Djuna Barnes, "Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians" (1916), in *Djuna Barnes's New York*, ed. Alyce Barry (London: Virago, 1990), 233–46, 242.

47. Robin Blyn, "*Nightwood*'s Freak Dandies: Decadence in the 1930s," *Modernism/modernity* 15, no. 3 (2008): 503–26.

48. Hart Crane, "C33," in *Hart Crane: Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2014), 91.

49. Hart Crane, "Joyce and Ethics," *Little Review*, July 1918. Repr. in *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1997), 14–15.

50. Andrew Thacker, "Greenwich Village: Introduction," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2, *North America 1894–1960*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 439–44, 442.

51. Mina Loy, "Lunar Baedeker," in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), 81–82.

52. Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), ix.

53. Moe Meyer, "Under the Sign of Wilde: An Archaeology of Posing," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Moe Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994), 81.

54. Gregory W. Bredbeck, "Narcissus in the Wilde: Textual Cathexis and the Historical Origins of Queer Camp," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Moe Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994), 51–74.

55. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 275–93, 286.

1 Dainty Malice

Ada Leverson and Post-Victorian Decadent Feminism

Kristin Mahoney

In her final novel, *Love at Second Sight* (1916), Ada Leverson describes her heroine Edith Ottley as "fair, with rather dark eyebrows, grey eyes and the mouth and chin characteristic of Burne-Jones's and Rossetti's pictures."[1] Leverson is careful, however, to indicate that Edith's Pre-Raphaelite appearance does not render her passé. "Though she might be in appearance a Burne-Jones," Leverson insists, "she was very modern."[2] In Edith, and throughout the six novels she wrote in the early decades of the twentieth century, Leverson thematizes her own peculiar literary-historical positioning at the point of tension between Victorian aestheticism and the modernism of the early twentieth century. While she was revered primarily in the twentieth century as a conduit to the 1890s and to memories of her close friend Oscar Wilde, she engaged enthusiastically with modernist culture and produced her most significant work in the 1900s and 1910s. A review of her work published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1950 struggled with this tension, noting that, "although associated with the Nineties as a contributor to the *Yellow Book*, her style has an economy and directness that belongs to a later and more coherent school."[3] Leverson's simultaneous engagement with a Wildean past and an avant-garde present made her a favorite of camp modernists, for whom the turn to decadence had begun to operate as a queer alternative to high modernism. She was adored by the Sitwells, Ronald Firbank, and Harold Acton and hailed by them as a vital connection to the fin de siècle, as well as an incisive critic of contemporary aesthetic trends. In her novels and her contributions to modernist periodicals, she was able to turn her decadent wit on modernism's faddishness and excessive bravado. It was as if, through her, slighted and sidelined camp modernists, such as Osbert Sitwell, were granted the opportunity to watch Wilde's withering reception of masculinist avant-gardism. In addition, her Wildean

wit and dandyish disdain served for these sidelined modernists as models for how one might spar with more homophobic and misogynist strands of modernism.

If there was a tension in Leverson's literary-historical positioning, however, her relationship with the decadent movement with which the camp modernists most associated her was similarly conflicted. Leverson struggled throughout her career to locate herself, as a feminist writer, within the decadent tradition, and this, too, is thematized in her novels of the twentieth century, in which she theorizes her uneasy alliance with dandyism and decadence. In the novels, she turns Wildean and Beerbohmian wit to a feminist purpose, wielding irony and epigrams as tools for skewering modern marriage and misogyny. Purposefully avoiding the earnestness of the New Woman fiction of the 1890s or the aggressive directness of the suffragettes, Leverson engages in an oblique form of feminist critique practiced at a decadent, detached remove, sidestepping the more direct tactics of her twentieth-century contemporaries to voice a wry, clever vision of the disappointments that marked feminine existence. However, if decadent paradox, irony, and epigrams prove themselves useful instruments with which to approach the problems besetting women, the novels' plots, as opposed to their style, register a greater degree of skepticism about the extent to which decadence might be a girl's best friend. Dandies, "exquisites," and post-Victorian decadents play prominent roles in each of the novels, often operating as allies or objects of attraction. Yet while these figures do at times buttress Leverson's heroines, the novels just as frequently express reservations about alliances between dissatisfied women and dandy-aesthetes. In this, her novels of the twentieth century may be understood as meditations on the political utility of cooperation between feminist writers and decadence. Her novels indicate that, far after the turn of the century, she continued to see the decadent aesthetic as a rich foundation for a more indirect mode of feminism, but these works simultaneously register anxieties about relying on a tradition linked to misogyny when formulating a feminist project. In this essay, I will consider Leverson as positioned between two literary-historical periods and between feminism and decadence. Leverson, in her works of the twentieth century, operated as an alternative to masculinist modernism, an alternative to more earnest and straightforward modes of feminism, and an example of how decadence might be put to feminist ends. However, her novels, as well as her own treatment at the hands of camp modernists in the twentieth century, indicate the potential shortcomings of such an alliance.

Decadence and the Sphinx

Leverson is best remembered as a friend of Oscar Wilde, as the loyal ally who supported and sheltered him during his trials and the witty woman he christened "the Sphinx of Modern Life," a moniker by which she was known until the day she died.[4] However, she made a name for herself in the 1890s by satirizing her dear friend and the movement with which he was associated in the pages of *Punch* and the *Yellow Book*. As Margaret Debelius notes, though Leverson identified with decadence's aesthetic sensibility, in her parodies of the movement published in these periodicals she engaged in a "feminist subversion" of decadence and its "vexed relationship to women."[5] Dennis Denisoff similarly argues that, though Leverson was recognized as a part of Wilde and Max Beerbohm's community, "she was also one of its sharpest critics."[6] Her critiques of decadence, which focused primarily on the misogyny that persisted in this "relatively gay-positive community," were written within a decadent vernacular, thereby attracting a decadent audience and forcing dandy-aesthetes to "confront their own biases."[7] Wilde's earliest correspondence with Leverson makes it clear that he thoroughly enjoyed her lampoons of decadence. Referencing her satirical treatment of his work in *Punch* in 1893, he calls her sketches "brilliant," "wonderful, witty, delightful," and "full of *esprit* and intellectual sympathy."[8] Wilde's emphasis on her "intellectual sympathy" with his work indicates that he comprehended her complex relationship to decadence, her position within and without the movement, and her status as a practitioner of its aesthetic who nevertheless noted its follies and excesses.

Leverson's sympathy with and apartness from decadence registers most clearly in the two parodies of the dandy-aesthete that she published in the *Yellow Book.* The presence of her work within the pages of this periodical, along with the inclusion of a portrait of Leverson by Walter Sickert in the issue in which the first story appeared, advertises her status as a decadent insider. The stories, however, represent the dandy-aesthete as ruthless and amoral in his treatment of women. "Suggestion" (1895) introduces Cecil ("Cissy") Carington in its very first sentence as a young man who has been vilified by Lady Winthrop as an "intolerable, effeminate boy" and thus, in revenge, dashes her hopes of marrying his widowed father.[9] His vengeance is enacted in aesthetic terms. He ensures that Lady Winthrop arrives at his father's dinner party unaware that evening dress was expected and then watches with pleasure as she "[displays] herself, mentally and physically, to

the utmost disadvantage . . . in a plaid blouse and a vile temper."[10] He decorates his sister Marjorie's school friend Laura in orchids as an "adorable contrast" to Lady Winthrop and in this suggests to his father the younger woman as a more attractive partner.[11] Cecil in turn sabotages this relationship by arranging an affair between Laura and another dandy. In "The Quest of Sorrow" (1896), Cecil tries to suffer romantic frustration by engaging in a flirtation with the beloved of his closest friend Freddy, Alice Sinclair. Rather than rejecting his advances, Alice falls in love with Cecil and breaks off her engagement, forcing him to flee to France, concluding that "grief was the one thing life meant to deny me."[12] Debelius argues that Leverson "dissects the cruelty and narcissism of [Cecil]" and "[draws] attention to the narcissism that characterized so many members of the high aesthetic band."[13] Charles Burkhart similarly asserts that the two stories "are alike in their quiet condemnation of a way of life that is heartless in its wit and selfish in its elegance."[14]

To read Leverson's *Yellow Book* stories as entirely critical of decadence and dandyism, however, neglects the pleasure they take in Cecil's anarchic disruption of patriarchal structures. Cecil's decision to foster an affair between Laura and Adrian in "Suggestion" is inspired by the discovery of his father's infidelity, which leads Cecil to decide that he, Laura, and Marjorie "all three dislike father about equally."[15] William M. Harrison asserts that the three characters' shared distaste for Cecil's father transforms them into a set of dissident siblings: "Thus in the Carington household, stepmother becomes sibling and confidante in the struggle against the father. This . . . is the core of Cissy's mediated 'queer' challenge."[16] Denisoff argues that "the story suggests that the patriarch will get his own through the wife reciprocating his infidelity" and foregrounds the fact that this revenge is engineered by the dandy-aesthete.[17] Cecil might treat women as pawns, but he levels his greatest wrath at patriarchal privilege. "Quest for Sorrow" similarly works to undo conventional forms of power and desire. As Harrison argues, Cecil sabotages the negotiated union between Alice and Freddy and then "exits the heterosexual drama for a more exotic narrative terrain" in the sexually permissive space of France.[18] While these stories do highlight the dandy-aesthete's cruelty toward women, they also revel in the decadent's capacity to throw patriarchy into chaos and slip the noose of heteronormative control.

Leverson's relationships with the decadents themselves were as complicated as her relationship to the decadent aesthetic. Her correspondence with Oscar Wilde and Max Beerbohm was at once flirtatious and ironic, composed of performances of romantic conventions conducted with a knowing

smile. Wilde sent telegrams to announce that they would eat pomegranates together and letters on "rose-coloured" paper to say that she was "one of those—alas, too few—who are always followed by the flutes of the Pagan World."[19] Robert Viscusi describes Leverson as willingly playing the part of "mother-lover" in her slightly stranger correspondence with Beerbohm, in which he often signed his letters "Baby."[20] Richard Dellamora has referred to the friendship between Wilde and Leverson as a primary example of "the mutual attraction between Wilde and dissident women," noting that women writers with ties to decadence "drew on the tactics of same-sex desire in male cultural production in order to (re)present women beyond the limits of the bourgeois sexual economy."[21] Performing flirtation with men such as Wilde and Beerbohm allowed Leverson to engage in what Richard Kaye has referred to as "a libidinal form of loitering without intent," a mode of eroticism that circumvents the bourgeois sexual economy by refusing resolution.[22] Within these exchanges, Leverson always seemed to remain aware of the level of sincerity involved and very much in on the joke. Beerbohm wrote to Wilde's closest friend Robert Ross, "Mrs Leverson is delighted at your saying that she almost persuadeth you to be a 'mulierast.' "[23] She was, Beerbohm stresses here, *almost* a temptation to the men with which she surrounded herself, and she found that liminal status, on the border of attraction, delightful. Her flirtations with decadent men were at once erotic and sardonic, offering a pleasurable source of liberation from the unhappy confines of her marriage and a space in which to develop her capacity for wit and irony. Operating within the decadent tradition of detachment, she responded coolly yet with curiosity to the playful advances of the men with which she had ambivalently cast her lot. This is the spirit that underwrites the post-Victorian decadent aesthetic of Leverson's twentieth-century novels, which simultaneously employ and interrogate decadence, treating dandies as at once alluring and devious and relying on tools adapted from the decadent tradition to attack persisting forms of gender inequality.

"Dainty Malice and Delicate Satire": The Novels of Ada Leverson

Leverson published her first novel, *The Twelfth Hour*, in 1907, twelve years after Wilde went to prison and seven years after his death. In this novel, however, as well as the five that followed, she purposefully implemented a decidedly Wildean aesthetic. Stylistically, the novels more properly resemble plays, "dominated by dialogue," as Jane Eldridge Miller states, or, as

Burkhart puts it, written in a "quasi-dramatic form" that bears the mark of Wilde.[24] Men and women engage in witty repartee in domestic settings, rapidly spouting epigrams about the nature of love and marriage. These works are the missing link between *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the acerbic novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett, in which Wildean wit is turned mercilessly upon family and the father. Leverson's novels are, however, a far cry from Compton-Burnett's caustic critique of patriarchy or the more radical forms of feminist discourse with which they coexisted, such as the suffrage dramas of 1900s and 1910s, the militant campaign for women's right to vote, or the works of Olive Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Suffragettes and "strong-minded" women who "[talk] chiefly of the franchise" are, in fact, repeatedly ridiculed in the novels, and, as Miller states, "the conflict in Leverson's novels is not whether to marry (or stay married) or not but, rather, how to reconcile one's desires as an individual with the requirements of marriage."[25] Leverson's post-Victorian decadent anachronism, then, should be understood not only as a rejection of modernist options but also as a rejection of more explicit and direct forms of feminist critique.

The public responded warmly to her decadent humor, style, and indirection, and reviewers spoke enthusiastically of the novels' "faint flavour of the clever stories which were written for the 'Yellow Book,'" as well as their "witty epigram."[26] Sally Beauman, however, has expressed concern that critics "missed the underlying steel—mistook the feint perhaps, or seeing the palpable hit judged it slight, not realizing its aim made it deadly."[27] This does not seem to have been entirely true. While some critics did refer to the novels as "soufflés," "charlotte russes," and "puff pastries," a review of *The Limit* (1911) in the *Star*, for example, made note of her "dainty malice and delicate satire."[28] This description, redolent of the celebration of Max Beerbohm's delicacy and precision while calmly skewering his opponents, registers properly the dandyish spirit of Leverson's approach.[29] Leverson implemented fin-de-siècle methodologies in her representation of twentieth-century gender politics, speaking with "dainty malice" about the unhappiness of modern domestic arrangements during a particularly vexed moment of feminist agitation.

Leverson's own marriage was unhappy and unsuccessful. She was engaged at age nineteen to Ernest Leverson, the son of a diamond merchant. Violet Wyndham, Leverson's daughter, notes in a biographical sketch of her mother that "after the marriage it was a shock to discover that a little girl being brought up in a convent in Paris, whom [Ernest] had described as his

ward, was in reality his illegitimate daughter."[30] This was the first of a series of disappointments. Ernest gambled. He carried on affairs. He made advances to her sister Evelyn. He had a violent temper. According to Wyndham, "Often, when dressed to go out to dinner together, the Sphinx would be sent back to her room in tears to scrub her face free from suspected rouge."[31] Wyndham states that, in the face of all of Ernest's terrible behavior, Ada maintained a "detached but affectionate way of laughing at him."[32] Writing advice to married women, Leverson notes that "many a man who is taken most seriously by the world is regarded by his wife as supremely comic."[33] Laughter, she indicates, has the capacity to contain and diminish tyrants, a strategy for which her own disastrous marriage operated as a testing site. She refused to divorce Ernest, dreading the humiliation and scandal the court proceedings might involve, but they finally separated in 1902, when a bad investment on Ernest's part lost the Leversons almost all of their money. Ernest moved to Canada with his illegitimate daughter, and the Sphinx had the last laugh, dedicating *Bird of Paradise* (1914), a marriage problem novel devoted to the operations of jealousy, to him.

Leverson's novels are marked by the detached laughter of which Violet Wyndham made note, treating the indignities suffered by married women as a source of wry humor. Her fullest and most satisfying critique of marriage is articulated in the trilogy concerning "the little Ottleys" (*Love's Shadow* [1908], *Tenterhooks* [1912], and *Love at Second Sight* [1916]), which focuses on the relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite yet modern Edith and the maddening and idiotic Bruce. Bruce Ottley carries on affairs with the governess, an art student, and a house guest; persistently blames Edith for his own mistakes; and renders her domestic life a game of strategy in which she must quietly bend her inferior opponent to her will. As Miller argues, "The cardinal rule in Edith's world is to maintain one's style, and never show any effort or strain; as a woman, she is required to exercise power unobtrusively so as to not disturb the masculine ego or the relations between the sexes."[34] Her barbs are subtle and often go unnoticed by Bruce. She quietly calls attention to his tightfistedness by responding to his query of what she plans to wear to a dinner party, "My Other Dress."[35] Her acts of rebellion are never direct or aggressive but rather involve quiet jokes made with herself. She playfully engages in an extended debate about her right to keep the letters she receives private, leading a suspicious Bruce to snatch what is in fact a laundry receipt from her hands. While he tears the envelope open with "trembling fingers," she retreats to her room, shuts the door, and throws herself

on the bed, "her whole frame shaking with suppressed laughter."[36] Edith's methods, along with the tone of the novels themselves, remain arch and light, but, as Miller notes, the humor often "reveals rather than obscures disturbing and unpleasant realities."[37] A review of *Love's Shadow* in *Punch* foregrounded Edith's patience and forbearance in dealing with Bruce's foibles, referring to Edith as "a noble example of restrained humour."[38] The cool restraint with which Edith responds to Bruce's maddening behavior often seems brittle, indicating that what is being held back is real sadness and anger, but a cold and condescending smile is posited within the Ottley trilogy as a method for preserving dignity in the face of relentless frustration.

Leverson made a purposeful choice, then, to continually return to and resuscitate an aesthetic of the recent past as an instrument for dissecting the difficulties besetting married women. However, while she relies on the dandy's withering disdain to engage the problem of marriage, dandies themselves are not so wholeheartedly embraced within her novels. Dandy-aesthetes are certainly treated as potential erotic objects. They dazzle and entertain Leverson's heroines. But the novels seem to struggle with how to place these amoral and self-interested men within their fictional sexual economy. Felicity, for example, the heroine of *The Twelfth Hour* (1907), stands at a point of dissatisfied tension between her collector-aesthete husband Lord Chetwode, who treats her like a bibelot, and the fop Bertie Wilton, who "had the reputation of being the wittiest of all the dandies."[39] The two are equally so preoccupied with fashion and decoration that they are unable to truly engage with Felicity and satisfy her desires. Bertie echoes Wilde's words to Leverson on his release from prison ("Sphinx, how marvellous of you to know exactly the right hat to wear at seven o'clock in the morning to meet a friend who has been away!"), stating "How marvellous of you! . . . I'm thunderstruck at your having exactly the right thing to wear, to come down early in the morning to see a too persistent friend! . . . Pale green—how well it suits you; and how wonderful of you to be so empireish—at this hour!"[40] Wilde's words, however, have been stripped of their poignancy and authentic affection, transformed into an excessively superficial meditation on dress. Felicity's problems are at least partially resolved by the novel's end, after she pleads with her husband to treat her in a less detached, collectorly manner, but the reader is left uncertain that her husband truly has been cured of his coldness.

The problem of narcissistic dandyism returns in *The Limit* (1911), in which Valentia retreats from the boredom of her marriage to Romer Wyburn by

entering into a flirtation with her dandyish cousin Harry. Harry, however, is revealed to be devious and disloyal. Deep in debt, he pursues the hand of Alec Walmer, a wealthy young girl. When he, like Bertie, parrots Wilde's sweet greeting to Leverson ("I knew you had the clothes for every possible occasion; but still, to choose the exact right dress to put on to meet your cousin at dawn in the orchard"), the words are similarly emptied of their kindness, situated within a moment of deception, as Harry debates with himself whether to reveal to Valentia his relationship with Alec.[41] Romer is finally redeemed from the role of doltish dupe when, on discovering Harry and Valentia's affections for one another, he demands that Harry break his engagement with Alec so as to preserve Valentia's happiness. Upon hearing of Romer's self-sacrifice, his willingness to allow her affair with Harry to continue, she rejects Harry, coming to understand that Romer has "something finer than other people about him."[42] The novel implies that, while the dandy might not be a suitable mate, the conventionally masculine British husband becomes attractive once open to unconventional domestic arrangements, when he absorbs and integrates elements of the dandy's sexual dissidence. The novel was dedicated to Wilde's closest friend, Robert Ross, and it expresses a Wildean ethos despite its expressed suspicions of dandyism.

Bird of Paradise (1914) centers upon a similar scenario, focusing in this case on Bertha, dissatisfied with her marriage to the somewhat neglectful Percy Kellynch, who treats her "as a pet and a luxury."[43] Her first love, Nigel Hillier, "quick, lively, fascinating and witty," married another woman for money but nevertheless continues to haunt Bertha, masquerading as a dandyish ally when his motivations are, in fact, more devious and self-interested: "His plan . . . was to appear merely the amusing friend, until by some chance, he should feel his way to be more secure; to be, in fact, a kind of tame cat, a *camarade*, useful, and intellectually sympathetic, unselfishly devoted—until, perhaps, the time might come when she might find she could not do without him."[44] Nigel's attentions, however, activate Percy's jealousy, and he begins to truly look at and love Bertha, and she realizes that "gay, amusing, witty, attractive Nigel bored her! Dull, serious, conventional Percy did not! She was in love with him. In books and plays it was always the other way: it was the husband that was the bore; but romances and comedies are often far away from life."[45] The dandy is useful here as catalyst for reinvigorating attraction.

Leverson's novels treat the dandy as a necessary and vital part of her heroines' modern world, and the texts often conclude that he is a figure that

might be of use. On the whole, these works express suspicion of the dandy's selfishness and vanity. They nevertheless repeatedly circle back to the very figure they are constantly in the process of rejecting, acknowledging the utility of the disruptive sexual dissidence the dandy-aesthete represents while insisting that he poses a threat to women. The Little Ottleys trilogy reaches a compromise on the issue, demoting the dandy to the position of confidant and secondary character, rather than primary object of attraction, suggesting that his self-interest and amorality might inform a more liberated mode of feminine behavior.[46] Leverson remains in these works, however, unable to imagine a true union with decadence, expressing hesitation about the very aesthetic upon which she so heavily relies.

The Sphinx among the Modernists

Leverson's novels of the twentieth century implement decadent style and meditate on fin-de-siècle figures, but they also critique those who are mired too entirely in the aestheticist past. Rupert Denison, for example, in *Bird of Paradise* practices "the rather old-world dandyism of a past generation. This was the odder as the year was 1913, and he was exactly thirty."[47] Bertha remarks upon his gift of a few dark roses and Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* to a friend, "Nothing like being up to date," and dismisses him as a "belated schoolmaster."[48] Felicity's Aunt William in *The Twelfth Hour* is similarly absurd in her anachronism, still very worried about the "fad" of aestheticism, which she believes to still be "fashionable," "[holding] forth to wondering young people, for whom the 1880s fashions were but an echo of ancient history, on the sad sinfulness of sunflowers and the fearful folly of Japanese fans."[49] Turning completely from the contemporary, occupying too thoroughly a moment long gone, Leverson implies, results in shameful ignorance. The novels rather celebrate those able to wed the past and the present, like Edith or her dandyish ally Vincy, who is "what used to be called an exquisite" but nevertheless occupies rooms "covered with pictures by Futurists and Cubists."[50] It is not necessary to embrace every new "ism," the novels suggest, but one must at least engage with and be aware of modern cultural developments. Edith Ottley's true love Aylmer Ross, for example, advertises himself as thoughtful and in the know when he compares decadence favorably to futurism:

> "The Futurist is off the rails entirely, and he seems to see hardly anything but railways. But all that noisy nonsense of the Futurists always bored me fright-

> fully. . . . Affectation for affectation, I prefer the pose of depression and pessimism to that of bullying and high spirits. When the affected young poet pretended to be used up and worn out, one knew there was vitality under it all. But when I see a cheerful young man shrieking about how full of life he is, banging on a drum, and blowing on a tin trumpet, and speaking of his good spirits, it depresses me, since naturally it gives the contrary impression. It can't be real. It ought to be but it isn't. If the noisy person meant what he said, he wouldn't say it."
>
> "I see. The modern poseurs aren't so good as the old ones. [Alan] Odle is not so clever as Beardsley."
>
> "Of course not. Beardsley had the gift of line—though he didn't always know where to draw it—but his illustrations to Wilde's work were unsuitable, because Beardsley wanted everything down in black and white, and Wilde wanted everything in purple and gold. But both had their restraints, and their pose was reserve, not flamboyance."[51]

One may remain decadent in one's tastes and one's behavior, retaining the restraint and detachment Aylmer so admires, so long as one continues to turn that cool gaze forward, onto what is contemporary and new.

This is the position that Leverson occupies in the works she published in the *English Review.* As Burkhart asserts, these pieces "indicate not only how powerfully the 1890s survived in Mrs. Leverson's mind but how naturally inquisitive she remained about innovations in the arts. Though the 1890s were the touchstone decade to her, she never became conservative . . . for no incrustations of old-fashioned notions impeded her fresh and eager interest in what was new."[52] In "Free Verse" (1919), Leverson lampoons the pretensions of the modernist poseur, the excessive investment in appearing up-to-date and aware that renders one vulnerable to another style of ignorance. Aubrey works himself into a frenzy as he forces his less fashionable friend George to appreciate the "stylistic radiance" in a piece of *vers libre*: "Don't you see the floridness of frigidity in it, George? DON'T YOU? . . . Don't you see, George, the standard's changed . . . and the chaps who were being made much of when you were here last are back numbers now?"[53] George inquires innocently of those "fellows who wanted to knock you into the middle of next week," and Aubrey retorts sharply, "Futurists? *Passés*."[54] In "Gentlemen v. Players: A Critic Match" (1922), however, the tables are turned, and the excessively nostalgic George, who admits to seeing Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* (1889) thirty-one times and never having heard of Freud or Jung, comes off as absurd. Aubrey, on the other hand, whose

walls are hung with pictures by Wyndham Lewis and Picasso, demonstrates the capacity to balance an appreciation of modernism with admiration for the fin de siècle. Holding a book of modern verse, he states that "in the 'nineties a volume of this kind would have been bound in green leather with gold tooling, and would have consisted chiefly of margin; full of beautiful unwritten thoughts."[55] He speaks nostalgically of the limited editions of the 1890s, stating, "Now there are poets by the thousand, instead of a small exclusive set," and while he asserts that he is unsure there was ever a "golden age" of poetry, he insists that "certainly the 'nineties were the dog-days of English poetry. How sultry and exotic they were!"[56] His preference remains, however, with the present, when "things seem . . . more vivid, more full of colour and spirit than that curious period ever was."[57] Aubrey models here a sense of taste that, while informed by a knowledge of literary history, nevertheless turns most enthusiastically to the rush of aesthetic innovation occurring during the 1920s.

Leverson's taste in the early twentieth century might be described in comparable terms, and her links with Wilde, along with her enthusiasm for contemporary aesthetic innovations, ensured her attractiveness to and alliance with a new generation of modernists and dandies. Camp modernists, who distinguished themselves from more masculinist forms of avant-gardism by expressing interest in the 1890s, treated her as a decadent medium. Ronald Firbank, for example, at once the most decadent and most avant-garde of the camp modernists, begged Wilde's son Vyvyan Holland to arrange a meeting with "'the Sphinx,' upon whom all stars of (the 1890s) had glittered. . . . Anyone who had sat on the floor in the half-light of a studio party with Aubrey Beardsley would surely be able to give particulars of him which would not be within the knowledge of his ordinary literary friends."[58] According to Samuel J. Rogal, William Somerset Maugham, who became friends with Leverson in 1908, "believed he had gotten close to Wilde in spirit if not in body by having been loved by a woman (Ada Leverson) who had loved Wilde."[59] His correspondence with Leverson provided him with the opportunity to mimic the tone of the decadents he admired and stand in the shoes of the men with whom she had flirted in the 1890s. "I know this is a dull letter," he wrote in 1908, "so leave a space in which I trust to your kindness & wit to insert a few sparkling epigrams & then ascribe them to me."[60] Even the more mainstream or "high modernists," who carefully repressed and denied their indebtedness to the fin de siècle, found her firsthand reports of the recent past appealing.[61] T. S. Eliot, for example, published her account of

the opening night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, "The Last First Night," in the highly significant January 1926 issue of the *New Criterion*, allowing her to channel Wilde's wit across three decades. ("Don't go sit on the same chair as Aubrey [Beardsley]," Wilde had said to her that evening, "It's not compromising.")[62] Her warm celebration of the "spectacular genius" of her old friend appeared in the issue beside work by Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and D. H. Lawrence, establishing a continuing space for decadent aesthetics in the very center of modernist discourse.[63]

Leverson's closest connection with modernism, and with camp modernism more specifically, emerged from her friendship with the Sitwell siblings. In 1911, Leverson's sister Violet married Sydney Schiff, one of the most significant modernist patrons and a close friend to Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and the Sitwells, and this union brought her into contact with many of the rising stars of modernism.[64] Julie Speedie speculates that Leverson first encountered Edith, Osbert, and Sacheverell Sitwell at the Schiffs' home in the autumn of 1919. Leverson found the siblings and their work immensely appealing and immediately began advocating on their behalf, contacting the publisher Grant Richards and Austin Harrison, editor of the *English Review*, and encouraging them to publish the strange and challenging writing of the Sitwells. Her correspondence with Osbert and Edith reveals Leverson operating as confidante and advisor, a trusted friend, and an authority in matters of culture. She offered useful advice about potential placements for their work, and she consulted with Edith concerning her costuming for performances of *Façade*, assisting another feminist writer in conceptualizing her embodied self-presentation.[65] While the siblings, whose tastes ran in a decidedly decadent direction, certainly revered her connections with Oscar Wilde, they also took seriously her responses to and opinions of contemporary developments in the arts. In later years, Osbert would note that while every book she wrote was "redolent" of the 1890s, she was "very modern-minded."[66] According to Sitwell, "the young of the 'twenties . . . amused her," and she "liked to live in the time she lived in, and the ways of thinking, the manners and social outlook of each decade interested her."[67] In her correspondence with Osbert, she advertised herself as an active reader and critic of modernism and the avant-garde. Responding to Lewis's magazine *Tyro*, Leverson noted that "Bestre is very good & some of the essays on art & especially the one on art & games by [Lewis] are splendid. The Tyronic dialogues I like less but they are amusingly Chelsea-ish."[68] *Ulysses* she found "terribly obscene" but "clever."[69] In his letters to her, Osbert spoke candidly

about his interactions with key modernist figures, and he responded enthusiastically to the satires of modernism she published in the *English Review.* In 1922, Sacheverell dedicated to her a collection of poetry, *The Hundred and One Harlequins*, publicly tipping his hat to the woman who had done so much for the three siblings.

Leverson's experiences with the camp modernists, however, bore out the reservations about forging alliances with dandies and the decadent tradition expressed in her novels. Decadence's trouble with women persisted in camp modernism, and though figures associated with this more dandyish strain of modernism might have turned to Leverson as a decadent oracle, she nevertheless was for them frequently a figure of fun. While they acknowledged her wit and insight, their representation of her in their nonfiction prose often smacks of condescension or even exasperation. In his recollections of Leverson in *Noble Essences* (1950), Osbert Sitwell, for example, records that it was a "condition" of her coming along with them to Italy "that she would act, so far as within her power, on the motto [he] had devised for her: *Silence and Self-Help.*"[70] In *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (1948), Harold Acton derisively recounts the symptoms of her "Sitwell obsession": "[diving] into the depths of a shapeless bag" in search of a letter from Osbert with an "expression of anguish on her face as she rummaged, fishing out a comb, a lipstick, a cracked mirror and various feminine oddments."[71] On finally producing the letter, "entangled in a green crêpe de Chine kerchief, . . . much stained with rouge and inkspots," she announced with pride, "You see, . . . he sends me his love."[72] While decadence's elderly statesmen, such as Max Beerbohm, were accorded an unwavering respect, Leverson is often cast by the camp modernists as a needy and grotesque elderly woman absurd in her attachments to younger men. Into the 1920s and '30s, Leverson continued to negotiate with the marginalization of femininity within the decadent tradition, of which camp modernism was a part.

The harshest treatment of Leverson, however, came at the hands of the most masculinist of *avant-gardistes*, Wyndham Lewis, who collapsed her with camp modernism in *The Apes of God* (1932), a satirical novel focusing on the world of Bloomsbury. She appears as "the Sibyl" in the novel's 250-page chapter "Lord Osmund's Lenten Party," alongside her beloved Sitwells, here the "Finnian Shaws." Lewis expresses vitriolic distaste for the queer partnership between the Sibyl and Osbert, or "Lord Osmund," who are bound together by their withering wit. He describes the Sibyl as Osmund's "reigning pet," a lady from a "distant generation" who supplies him with "tit-bits

of Gossip arranged with his favourite sauces, the old yellow sauces of the Naughty Nineties," "the sacrosanct period-of-periods . . . that *Made the World Safe for Homosexuality!*"[73] Osmund's eyes "[dwell] indulgently upon this living period-piece in crazy motion—consecrated by Saint Oscar—in which paradoxical repository the author of *Sobs in Quad*, or the Ballad of a Broken-Hearted Fairy, had secreted wit."[74] The extent to which Lewis must have been intimidated by the camp wit he pretends to scorn is revealed in his representation of Osmund's "[coos]" and "[sneers]," of the Finnian Shaws "[dying]" in "[fits]" of "little snuffling laughter."[75] Lewis portrays Leverson as a fussy snob, who refers to servants as "stupid" and expresses a preference for "cruel people."[76] His portrait of Leverson and the Sitwells is at once homophobic, misogynist, and ageist. He trembles with a strange combination of rage, disgust, and fear at their engagement with the Victorian past, their femininity, and their elitism.

In his response to this outrage, Osbert attempted to replicate the cool detachment of the dandy modeled to him so effectively by Leverson in her withering statements about the "bullying and high spirits" of contemporary avant-gardes. He sent her a poem, "*Almanac des Singes*," in which he represents Lewis as vulgar, poor, and ugly:

> In his own image, God makes Man, 'tis said;
> —And so it was until the final scrimmage
> Of Percy 'gainst the World; for now he's made
> Ape-God himself, his Apes in his own image.
>
> They are not like those whom he tries to paint
> So black (Indeed, he doth protest too shrilly);
> But are the pattern of himself, so quaint
> And mean and fat and shy and soft and silly.
>
> Is there a single Ape in all his Almanac
> From whom our Percy has not borrowed money?
> Let us admit the way he pays them back
> Is really rather funny.[77]

Enacting Lewis's paranoid fantasies about camp modernism's elitism, Osbert stresses his opponent's reliance on patrons such as the Schiffs and portrays him as fundamentally déclassé. Leverson, however, upped the ante in her own dandyish response. As her grandson Francis Wyndham records, "she was the only target of [Lewis's] satirical malice to be clearly delighted, and

even flattered, by the attention."[78] She wrote repeatedly to Wilde's close friend Reggie Turner encouraging him to purchase and read *The Apes of God*. Turner wrote to Acton, "The Sphinx is pleased, I can see, not unnaturally, because she is in it."[79] Like Wilde's lecture tour in the United States, conducted in concert with American performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's satire of aestheticism, *Patience* (1881), Leverson's pleasure neutralizes the power of the satire. Her delight renders Lewis's angry, ugly misogyny pitiable, deflating and defanging his blustering attempt to bother the unflappable Sphinx.

Violet Wyndham remarks of her mother that she "welcomed change, was refreshed by the young by reason of the novelty of their tastes and thought." She notes, however, that while "the Sphinx had a strong sense of the present," this "did not derive from a disdain of the past."[80] She stayed, until the end of her life, as the French chef Marcel Boulestin describes her, faithful to Wilde and "faithful too, in a way, to that period."[81] In her final book, *Letters to the Sphinx from Oscar Wilde with Reminiscences of the Author* (1930), she spoke warmly in defense of her friend, now deceased for three decades: "Oscar was the most generous man I have ever met."[82] If her alliance with decadence and the camp modernist tradition it spawned remained throughout her career an uneasy one, she was, from the fin de siècle into the modernist moment, one of the aesthetic's most effective practitioners and Wilde's staunchest defender. And while she might have been right to believe that there was something at the center of decadence hostile to women, perhaps if she had known about the derision with which the inheritors of the decadent tradition wrote of her after her death, she would have simply laughed.

Notes

1. Ada Leverson, *Love at Second Sight* (London: Grant Richards, 1916), 203.

2. Leverson, *Love at Second Sight*, 203.

3. "Visiting the Sphinx," *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 Dec. 1950, 825.

4. Ada Leverson, *Letters to the Sphinx from Oscar Wilde with Reminiscences of the Author* (London: Duckworth, 1930), 50.

5. Margaret Debelius, "Countering a Counterpoetics," in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Psomiades (Charlottesville: U Virginia P, 1999), 193, 197.

6. Dennis Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody, 1840–1940* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), 104.

7. Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody*, 105.

8. Oscar Wilde to Ada Leverson, ca. 15 July 1893, in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 569.

9. Ada Leverson, "Suggestion," *Yellow Book* 5 (1895): 249.

10. Leverson, "Suggestion," 250.

11. Leverson, "Suggestion," 250.

12. Ada Leverson, "The Quest of Sorrow," *Yellow Book* 8 (1896): 335.

13. Debelius, "Countering a Counterpoetics," 206.

14. Charles Burkhart, *Ada Leverson* (New York: Twayne, 1973), 76.

15. Leverson, "Suggestion," 251.

16. William M. Harrison, "Ada Leverson's Wild(e) *Yellow Book* Stories," *Victorian Newsletter* 96 (1999): 24.

17. Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody*, 106.

18. Harrison, "Ada Leverson's Wild(e) *Yellow Book* Stories," 27.

19. Oscar Wilde to Ada Leverson, 1893, in Leverson, *Letters to the Sphinx*, 51.

20. Robert Viscusi, *Max Beerbohm, or the Dandy Dante: Rereading with Mirrors* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 97.

21. Richard Dellamora, introduction to *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1999), 8.

22. Richard Kaye, *The Flirt's Tragedy: Desire without End in Victorian and Edwardian Fiction* (Charlottesville: U Virginia P, 2002), 4. Kaye argues that flirting "[fosters] insurrectionary energies," particularly in a "male-dominated order, in which marriage was prized as a satisfying resolution," by "[violating] . . . the smooth functioning of middle-class interests and aspirations" (4).

23. Max Beerbohm to Robert Ross, 14 Nov. 1894, in *Letters of Max Beerbohm, 1892–1956*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 6.

24. Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism, and the Edwardian Novel* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1997), 56; Burkhart, *Ada Leverson*, 61. Burkhart notes that Leverson's "instinctive turn" was from the first for dialogue and describes the dialogue of her early sketches published in *Black and White* as "theatrical in nature" (61).

25. Leverson, *Love at Second Sight*, 18; Miller, *Rebel Women*, 54.

26. Review of *The Limit*, by Ada Leverson, *Westminster Gazette* 37 (1 Apr. 1911): 7; review of *The Limit*, by Ada Leverson, *Vanity Fair* 86 (5 Mar. 1911): 298.

27. Sally Beauman, introduction to *The Little Ottleys*, by Ada Leverson (London: Virago, 1982), xiii.

28. Burkhart states that "a dozen reviewers of [Leverson's] books" used the term "soufflé" and that "'charlotte russe' has also been employed and even 'puff pastry'" (Burkhart, *Ada Leverson*, 93). The terms "dainty malice" and "delicate satire" appear in review of *The Limit*, by Ada Leverson, *Star*, 18 Mar. 1911, 2.

29. Wilde referred to Beerbohm as possessing a style "like a silver dagger," foregrounding his precision. Quoted in S. N. Behrman, *Portrait of Max* (New York: Random House, 1960), 48. Bohun Lynch highlighted his calmness and cool detachment: "There is nothing assertive or pushing about Max, even when he is most egoistic. He is quiet always, and delicate." Bohun Lynch, *Max Beerbohm in Perspective* (London: William Heinemann, 1921), 130.

30. Violet Wyndham, *The Sphinx and Her Circle* (New York: Vanguard, 1963), 17.

31. V. Wyndham, *Sphinx and Her Circle*, 58–59.

32. V. Wyndham, *Sphinx and Her Circle*, 51.

33. Quoted in Julie Speedie, *Wonderful Sphinx: The Biography of Ada Leverson* (London: Virago, 1993), 16.

34. Miller, *Rebel Women*, 55.

35. Ada Leverson, *Love's Shadow* (London: Grant Richards, 1908), 39.

36. Ada Leverson, *Tenterhooks* (London: Grant Richards, 1912), 143.

37. Miller, *Rebel Women*, 55.

38. Review of *Love's Shadow*, by Ada Leverson, *Punch* 135 (29 July 1908): 90.

39. Ada Leverson, *The Twelfth Hour* (London: Grant Richards, 1907), 63.

40. Leverson, *Letters to the Sphinx*, 45; Leverson, *Twelfth Hour*, 191.

41. Ada Leverson, *The Limit* (London: Grant Richard, 1911), 229.

42. Leverson, *Limit*, 289.

43. Ada Leverson, *Bird of Paradise* (London: Grant Richard, 1914), 40.

44. Leverson, *Bird of Paradise*, 78.

45. Leverson, *Bird of Paradise*, 253.

46. In *Tenterhooks*, the dandyish Vincy Wenham Vincy serves as Edith's close friend and confidant, and in *Love at Second Sight*, the composer Sir Tito Landi plays a similar role.

47. Leverson, *Bird of Paradise*, 50.

48. Leverson, *Bird of Paradise*, 12.

49. Leverson, *Twelfth Hour*, 35.

50. Leverson, *Tenterhooks*, 97.

51. Leverson, *Love at Second Sight*, 121–22. Alan Odle (1888–1948), married to Dorothy Richardson, was an English illustrator whose work bears the mark of Beardsley's influence.

52. Burkhart, *Ada Leverson*, 83.

53. Ada Leverson, "Free Verse," *English Review* 29 (1919): 535.

54. Leverson, "Free Verse," 535.

55. Ada Leverson, "Gentlemen v. Players: A Critic Match," *English Review* 34 (1922): 333. This is a reference to Charles Ricketts's design of an edition of John Gray's *Silverpoints* (1893) that prompted Leverson to suggest to Wilde he might produce a book "*all* margin" (Leverson, *Letters to the Sphinx*, 19).

56. Leverson, "Gentlemen v. Players," 333.

57. Leverson, "Gentlemen v. Players," 333.

58. Vyvyan Holland, "Ronald Firbank," in *Ronald Firbank: A Memoir*, ed. Ifan Kyrle Fletcher (New York: Brentano's, 1932), 109–10.

59. Samuel J. Rogal, *A William Somerset Maugham Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), 310.

60. William Somerset Maugham to Ada Leverson, n.d., box 1, folder 10, W. Somerset Maugham Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT. While Maugham's letter to Leverson is not dated, it references *Love's Shadow*, which was published in 1908.

61. For discussion of modernism's indebtedness to decadence, see Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015).

62. Ada Leverson, "The Last First Night," *New Criterion* 4 (1926): 148–53. The January 1926 issue, the first to be published by the firm of Faber and Gwyer, constituted an overhaul of the format of the *Criterion* and included an essay by Eliot, "The Idea of a Literary Review," meant to frame his vision for this new version of the journal.

63. Leverson, "Last First Night," 152.

64. Schiff also published his own writing under the pseudonym "Stephen Hudson." For further discussion of the Schiffs, see Stephen Klaidman, *Sydney and Violet: Their Life with T. S. Eliot, Proust, Joyce, and the Excruciatingly Irascible Wyndham Lewis* (New York: Doubleday, 2013).

65. In 1923, Edith Sitwell recited her *Façade* poems through a megaphone to the accompaniment of music composed by William Walton in a performance at the Aeolian Hall.

66. Osbert Sitwell, *Noble Essences: A Book of Characters* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), 153.

67. Sitwell, *Noble Essences*, 153.

68. Ada Leverson to Osbert Sitwell, n.d., box 40, folder 3, Osbert Sitwell Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

69. Leverson to Sitwell.

70. Sitwell, *Noble Essences*, 148.

71. Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Methuen, 1948), 106.

72. Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete*, 106.

73. Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God* (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1932), 353, 506.

74. Lewis, *Apes of God*, 498.

75. Lewis, *Apes of God*, 378, 383.

76. Lewis, *Apes of God*, 369, 496.

77. Osbert Sitwell to Ada Leverson, n.d., cage 4669, Ada Leverson Letters from Sitwells, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University, Pullman, WA.

78. Francis Wyndham, *The Theatre of Embarrassment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991), 158.

79. Quoted in Speedie, *Wonderful Sphinx*, 264.

80. V. Wyndham, *Sphinx and Her Circle*, 99.

81. Marcel Boulestin, *Myself, My Two Countries* (London: Cassell, 1936), 78.

82. Leverson, *Letters to the Sphinx*, 47.

2 The Ugly Things of *Salome*

Ellen Crowell

Onstage, Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1893) resolves in a *tableau* only part *vivant*.[1] After the conclusion of Salome's long, amorous soliloquy over the head of John the Baptist, audiences are afforded a moment of relief. King Herod commands darkness as antidote to "seeing things" or allowing things to see him, and the stage goes dark. Those in the audience who, like Herod, have endured the aural and visual spectacle of Salome's five-hundred-word monologue intoned while fondling a severed head are allowed only a brief respite: Wilde's stage directions indicate that immediately after the "Voice of Salome" proclaims her necrophilic conquest ("I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan. I have kissed thy mouth"), the actress should be reilluminated, spotlit by "un rayon du lune," as is called for in Wilde's original French version of 1891. Thus framed, the living Salome and her dead prop head form one fixed tableau. "Kill that woman" is Herod's response, and the final stage directions orchestrate Salome's death: "The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judea."[2] Buried under metal (a mode of execution almost perversely awkward to orchestrate on stage), the princess and her prop reach their bloody end. When the curtain falls and the soldiers lift their shields, Salome rises again to take her bow. But what happens to the head?

The answer, it seems, depends on the head. If designed to mesh neatly with a production's overarching mise-en-scène, a prop might fade easily back into darkness. Importantly, however, almost every production of *Salome* from 1896 to the present day has used a naturalistic severed head. And such props, propelled into stage designs otherwise archly anti-realist, have almost as often elicited intense—if intensely strange—responses from audiences and critics alike. In *Axel's Castle* (1931), Edmund Wilson observed that the "literary history of our time is to a great extent that of the development

of Symbolism and of its fusion or conflict with Naturalism."[3] By approaching *Salome* through these prop heads and the controversy they inspired, this essay considers how the play's refusal to either fuse or fracture these two aesthetic modes offers a third route through the transition from symbolism/naturalism into modernism: irreconcilability as aesthetic critique. Repeated refrains of ornamented speech lull audiences into linking all aspects of the play—language, sets, movement—as unified expressions of a symbolist aesthetic. Yet this illusion of overarching tonal unity collides with an overlong Grand Guignol–style climax to produce the play's complex aesthetic affects. *Salome* closes on a dynamic dead end, where any "pure" expression of form or tonality turns against and annihilates itself to generate meta-aesthetic reflection.[4] Because in *Salome* symbolism and naturalism are left spectacularly unreconciled, a new aesthetic effect emerges from the clash.

Petra Dierkes-Thrun's *Salome's Modernity* establishes this fin-de-siècle one-act tragedy as absolutely central to modernism, repeatedly and variously claimed by twentieth-century artists in large part because of how it synthesizes a complex set of ideas about "aesthetics, eroticism and transgression . . . that forms an important undercurrent in the development of twentieth century modernism and modernist aesthetics."[5] Yet while *Salome* undeniably bridges fin-de-siècle and modernist aesthetic concerns and anticipates many of the formal and thematic innovations of modernist theatrical practice, the play also lays bare and even capitalizes on the fault lines between seemingly irreconcilable late Victorian aesthetics.

Salome builds affective dissonance through a final tableau in which two distinct generic tonalities collide and are held in tension. Because this tension is held for the length of Salome's monologue over the head (which cannot be delivered in fewer than five or six minutes and is often significantly longer), any feeling of shock or awe the tableau might initially inspire in an audience necessarily gives way to tedium and irritation, or "stuplimity." This "strange amalgam of shock and boredom," a mutation of the sublime, is one of the "weaker affects" that, in *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai identifies as registering modernity's ambivalent and equivocal attitudes toward the role of the aesthetic in delimiting art's political function.[6] Although Wilde appears nowhere in *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai's exploration of this antithetical affective amalgam allows us to see something new about *Salome* as a stage play: how the prop head of Iokanaan, as a theatrical object, introduces an intentional flaw, a productive mistake, an aesthetic amplification designed to trouble any

predetermined affective responses sutured to distinct ideas about art's social, moral, and political role.

Examining the "ugly things" of *Salome* thus exposes the divide between an early modernist disposition toward an avant-garde aesthetic that prizes internal coherence and generic/tonal purity and what I see as a more decadent disposition toward the same, in which existing generic forms (and the ideological meanings and functions they have accrued) are amplified, collided, or otherwise pushed toward absurd extremes until they collapse under their own weight. By "formulating a resistant stance by going limp or falling down" among the ruins of generic convention,[7] a decadent avant-garde aesthetic is one that de-cadences the machinery of form in order to empty out accrued meaning and create room for the new. *Salome* can therefore be understood as connected to twentieth-century drama not in its rejection, as Ellis Hanson has argued, of "the trend for heightened naturalism in the theatre,"[8] but instead in its ultimate insistence that the seemingly antithetical avant-garde modes of symbolism and naturalism are in fact linked: both through their rejection of nineteenth-century stage realism and melodrama and through the restrictive tonal orthodoxies they offer as antidotes. These orthodoxies leave both aesthetic modes prey to becoming pre-scripted and bankrupt, incapable of eliciting anything but affirmation or condemnation from a public trained to respond to art through generic and ideological shorthand.

Surveying the prop heads of *Salome*—including those used in Maud Allan's *Vision of Salome* and Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*—mounted in Paris, London, and New York between 1896 and 1908, this essay bears witness to the lively critique engendered by a parade of naturalistic prop heads panned, with few exceptions, as aesthetic failures: distractingly and disturbingly out of sync with the play's overall tone. Even when a production garnered general praise for all other production aspects—acting, lighting, sets, costumes, choreography, musical accompaniment—the prop heads designed for productions of *Salome* in the early modernist period inspired merciless mockery. In criticizing these heads as out of sync with the rest of the play, early twentieth-century reviewers seem to collectively miss the crucial revaluation of avant-garde aesthetics that Wilde's focalizing final scene facilitates. By arguing either that these heads looked too fake, and therefore forced a shift in register from tragedy to farce, or that their grotesquery clashed with an otherwise unified symbolist mode sustained across language, movement,

sets, and costuming, consumers of *Salome* in the early twentieth century expressed outrage over what one critic termed "the horror of the thing,"[9] without considering the ideas inherent in the thing itself.

"Un chose materiel, un chose laid": The Failed *Début* of '92

In June 1892, Wilde's *Salome* was in its third week of rehearsals at London's Royal English Opera House when the production was halted by Edward Pigott, then Examiner of Plays for the office of the Lord Chamberlain. Officially, the play was banned under a sixteenth-century law preventing the representation of biblical situations on the English stage. This rationale, however, came in for great mockery by theater critic William Archer, who wrote in the August 1892 issue of the *New Review*, "The most interesting event of the past month was one which did not take place."[10] The arrival of a new dramatic voice had been signaled earlier in the year with the debut of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and the "news that Sarah Bernhardt had accepted a play of his in French, and proposed to perform it in London" fueled hope that Wilde might continue to "enrich our poverty-stricken stage." That the play was to be performed in French and would star the greatest actress of the day were factors that seemed to mitigate against its being censored under a theatrical prohibition only spottily applied at the end of the nineteenth century. "Well, *Salomé* was cast and put in rehearsal, the scenery prepared, the costumes ordered," Archer writes, "when behold! from somewhere in the purlieus of St. James's, the voice of the All-Wise and All-Powerful was heard to thunder forth 'Desist!' Conceive the astonishment of the great actress thus suddenly and summarily informed that her intent was impious and must be abandoned! 'Who,' she would naturally ask, 'is this All-Wise and All-Powerful One, on whose single will depends the very existence of your dramatic literature? . . .' 'His name, madame, is Mr. Edward F. S. Pigott.' "[11] We do not know whether a dummy head was part of this "scenery" already prepared when Pigott passed judgment. Reporting in early July 1892 on the Lord Chamberlain's refusal to license "Mr. Oscar Wilde's new French play 'Salome,' " the *Glasgow Herald* referenced "a piece of waxwork representing the head of St. John the Baptist carried in upon a dish,"[12] and this is the only direct reference describing this first prop head that I have been able to locate. But even if no such prop had yet materialized for the 1892 production, we know that during Pigott's deliberation process he vividly imagined such a head.

In a private letter to Spencer Ponsonby, then Comptroller for the Lord Chamberlain, Pigott made clear that he based his decision to suppress the play on more than legal technicality. Sending Ponsonby a copy of the *Salome* manuscript for his friend's "*private* edification and amusement," Pigott describes the play as a "miracle of impudence" coalescing around the material requirement of a prop head: "[Salome's] love turns to fury because John will not let her kiss him *in the mouth*—and in the last scene, where she brings in his head—if you please—on a 'charger'—*she does* kiss his mouth, in a paroxysm of sexual despair."[13] Importantly, the lascivious implications of *Salome*'s "dance of the seven veils" do not seem first on this censor's mind. Instead of decrying the play's overall atmosphere of sexual deviance, Pigott reacts most intensely to one decadent thing: the dead mouth of the dead head. "Imagine," he concludes, "the average British public's reception of it."[14] The result, in William Archer's assessment, was that while Pigott "protects 'Yokanan' [*sic*] from the desecrating touch of poetry, the head of the poet is being nightly served up to the British public on a charger of silly ridicule."[15]

Because Wilde was unable to oversee a production of *Salome* in his lifetime, we know next to nothing about how the author imagined the head would look and function on stage. In fact, *Salome* is a play almost entirely devoid of stage props. Theater historian Richard Allen Cave has traced Wilde's influence on the "growing preoccupation with simplicity" in early twentieth-century drama, identifying in the few extant set sketches by Wilde (including one for *Lady Windermere's Fan* and two for *Salome*) an avant-garde minimalism, an "austere stage picture within which carefully selected details . . . take on symbolic significance."[16] Cave links Wilde's minimalist approach to set design to the aesthetic innovations of Wilde's collaborator Charles Ricketts, whose own set designs for *Salome* in 1906 show an indebtedness to and extension of design theories developed in tandem with Wilde. Cave, however, suggests that this functional minimalism, which "respected the structure and dramatic rhythm of the play" by eliminating "fussy detail," was crafted to convey an "undeniable unity of aesthetic effect."[17] But Iokanaan's head is a theatrical thing, a "*chose*" in the language of *Salome*, that seems always to retain its potential to disrupt any such "unity."

Joseph Donohue has recently and importantly identified the Philadelphia Free Library's *Salome* manuscript as the working rehearsal script for this failed 1892 production, complete with Wilde's emendations.[18] In both the French (1893) and English (1894) published editions of *Salome*, Queen Hero-

dias responds with brutal concision to Herod's associative, simile-encrusted description of the moon:

> HEROD: The moon has a strange look to-night. Has she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman. . . . I am sure she is looking for lovers. . . . Does she not reel like a drunken woman? She is like a mad woman, is she not?
>
> HERODIAS: No; the moon is like the moon, that is all.[19]

If we assume that there would have been some design element—representational or otherwise—representing the moon on stage in 1892, audience attention would have been trained on that element through Herod's repetitive language. Herodias's response rejects metaphoric elaboration and retrains our focus onto the moon as *prop*, as an object only "like" the moon in its exhibited construction. The Free Library rehearsal manuscript asks us to redouble our attention to *Salome* as a text first and foremost imagined for the stage, and in that manuscript Herodias is even more expansive: "Non. La Lune ressemble á la lune et c'est tout," she begins. But the script continues, with these lines crossed out in Wilde's hand: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que la lune? C'est un chose materiel. C'est un flambeau qui ne donne pas le lumiere. C'est un monde qui est morte." (What is the moon? It is a material thing. It is a lamp that does not give light. It is a world that is dead.)[20] In *Salome*, the word "chose" gathers force and weight through repetition. It appears thirty-three times in the Free Library rehearsal script: thirty-two times in typeface, including the instance above, and once more in Wilde's hand on a verso page. Well before Salome demands the one "thing" upon which the play's climax focuses, the "choses" of *Salome* are things at which one should not look and of which one should not speak ("choses qu'on ne peut pas voir," "ce n'est pas le moment de parler de ces choses"); absurd, disgusting, appalling, and monstrous things ("choses absurdes," "choses dégoûtantes," "choses épouvantables," "choses monstrueuses"); things that cause pain ("choses très blessantes"); and, above all, sinister things ("quelque chose sinistre," in Wilde's hand on the verso of p. 50).[21] By the time these various "choses" coalesce around one abject thing—"la tete de Iokanaan" demanded by Salome as payment for dancing "le danse de sept voiles"—this "chose laid" has accrued a meta-materiality that demands something more of its audience

than mere shock or horror. And to achieve this "something more" onstage requires a prop that shocks in a very specific way.

It is impossible to know what effect such a discordant object, thrust into the center of an otherwise minimalist set, might have had on audiences in 1892. Because the Lord Chamberlain banned the only production Wilde had any part in directing, we have no indication of how he might have wanted the head to look on stage. Nonetheless, the head's centrality to *Salome*'s action demands that we attend to what Donohue, in his critical introduction to the play, identifies as the "fundamental shock effect of the actual head," its position "at some prominent point on stage, perhaps on the stage floor, where it remains an intense focal point of interest from the moment of its appearance to the catastrophic end of the play."[22] Wilde's sustained critique of late Victorian realism, conducted most vociferously in his 1889 essay "The Decay of Lying" and in public letters defending *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891), might make it difficult for us to imagine that an 1892 stage production of *Salome* would have included a realistic prop head. Yet in the first published version of *Dorian Gray* (1890), the painter Basil Hallward bemoans the state of modern art not because it is enthralled to realism but because the realism in vogue is a debased form. "The harmony of soul and body," he muses, "how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a *realism that is bestial, an ideality that is void*."[23]

Here, strict generic or tonal divisions are identified as inhibiting the development of modern art, producing forms of realism (including naturalism) that dehumanize and forms of idealism (including symbolism) that lack substance or depth. If both symbolism and naturalism are forms lacking vitality, according to this formulation art moves forward when it reconnects body and soul, real and ideal. *Salome* begins to accomplish this task in its final moments. That such a merger poses a significant threat—moral, aesthetic, generic—is only verified by Herod's resolve, upon seeing the final tableau, to destroy it ("Kill that woman!"). If we understand *Salome* as extending *Dorian Gray*'s meditation on realist and idealist forms, a naturalistic prop head better serves this purpose than any nonrepresentational design.

In the Free Library rehearsal manuscript, when Herodias deems the moon a "chose materiel"—a lamp that gives no light, a world that is dead—her words both anticipate the "chose materiel" called forth at the play's end and expose the equally material stage properties of the moon. The moon, as a protean and mysterious image, *seems* to function as a transporting symbol

of the divine or the sublime—but is in the end exposed as predictably protean, a "void" idealism. The head, as an obdurately material object, *seems* to function as a riveting embodiment—but is in the end exposed as "bestial," dehumanizing realism. What this deleted line from Herodias offers us is a way to read both the moon and the head as material stage objects of equal value within the world of the play; neither mode of artifice, Wilde argues, has any more or less aesthetic power. Through thirty-one repetitions of the word "chose" (thirty-three if we count this early deletion and Wilde's handwritten "something sinister") Wilde overuses anaphora to break down our confidence in both linguistic and symbolic meaning. When Herod, upon witnessing Salome kiss the severed head, demands darkness, he does so because he cannot stand to look at "things," nor can he allow those things to look at him—and those "things" include both the monstrous head and the moon: "Eteignez les flambeaux. Cachez la lune! Cachez les etoiles! . . . Je ne veux pas regardez des choses. Je ne veux pas que des choses me regardent."[24]

In his essay "Salome, Simile, *Symboliste*," Ellis Hanson observes that in this play we find Wilde pulling off a rare fusion of symbolist and decadent aesthetics. But the moment of extreme aesthetic contrast created by the introduction of Iokanaan's prop head orchestrates a generic rupture that seems to complicate Hanson's assertion that in the play these two aesthetics operate "in seamless harmony."[25] Like the cadaverous "objet" that dominates Baudelaire's poem "Une Charogne" from *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), the grotesque charge of Iokanaan's head relies on and is animated by the symbolist milieu into which it intrudes. The shock of the play depends, as does Baudelaire's poem, on irreconcilability: the vacancy of symbolism must clash violently with the brutality of naturalism if the final tableau is to pose some kind of aesthetic challenge, produce some kind of affective shock. The sheer length of Salome's soliloquy over the head demands sustained audience engagement with a moment of vertiginous discord. Salome's drawn-out monologue forces sustained focus on the "chose material" to which she is speaking. And the longer she speaks, the more uncomfortable an audience becomes with a spectacle that draws its manipulative, shaping power from the appalling contrast between two seemingly opposed aesthetic modes and their ultimate fusion in a kiss that outrages, in Toril Moi's words, "a dessicated and moralistic demand for art to be decent, well-mannered, simple and harmonious."[26] If we imagine the kinds of props a staged version of "Une Charogne" might rely on to replicate for the theater the sensation of beautiful repulsion one feels upon reading Baudelaire's poem, we can bet-

ter consider how Wilde sought, in *Salome*, to explore the de-cadencing formal shock of decadent aesthetics within the new arena of avant-garde stage design.

The Right Thrill; or, The Banality of Excellent Ugliness

Why did Wilde delete Herodias's elaboration on the moon's "materiel" properties? Perhaps because, as an audience member supremely sensitized to the play's emphasis on "les choses materiel," he decided that Herodias's elaboration on the nature of the "chose" sounded a rather obvious note. By identifying this manuscript as the only extant rehearsal script for the failed 1892 *Salome*, Donohue has refocused our attention to the play's original conception for the stage and to the way Wilde emended *Salome* in response to seeing and hearing it performed in those June 1892 rehearsals. Close attention to notes on this manuscript shows Wilde working through and attempting to manage this particularly meaningful repetition without tipping over into obvious didacticism, and on the verso of page 62, which covers part of Salome's final speech to the head prop, Wilde scribbled to himself, "something shorter for Herodias."[27] In *Salome*, the thing *was* the play—and thus needed to be handled with delicacy.

However, if the 1896 world premiere of Wilde's one-act drama offers any indication, the more nuanced aspects of *Salome* "thing theory" were lost on most.[28] *Salome* was first staged in Paris by the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, a newly established company conceived by founder Aurélien Lugné-Poe as an experimental, symbolist counterweight to the radical naturalist productions mounted by Andre Antoine's Théâtre Libre. The Œuvre was not, however, completely resistant to realist or naturalist dramatic experiments: as Tydeman and Price observe, Lugné-Poe's experimental theatrical company pursued a flexible approach to avant-garde drama, mounting productions of Maurice Maeterlinck and August Strindberg, Wilde and Alfred Jarry. "The world premiere of *Salome*," they write, was therefore mounted by a "wholly appropriate" theatrical troupe: "sympathetic to symbolist principles and aesthetics, theatre and play both seemed nevertheless to acknowledge that symbolism in its pure form turns against itself and becomes a dramatic impossibility."[29] Noting this flexibility makes it less surprising that in this production of *Salome* the Œuvre's stated aesthetic commitment to "fantasy and dream" was juxtaposed to a prop choice altogether more material: a realistic wax head from Paris's *Musée Grévin*.[30]

Great care was taken in securing this "most difficult and most important"

object. Lugné-Poe feared that an unconvincing severed head risked "provok[ing] disastrous hilarity," rather than transcendent horror, at the play's crucial climax.[31] Unfortunately, on the last night of rehearsals, the head toppled from its silver charger and shattered into pieces on the stage, "as noisily as a cracking soup toureen."[32] Hastily repaired, this patchwork head performed its requisite role for *Salome*'s world premiere and seems to have done so without eliciting much comment at all, hilarious or otherwise. Francisque Sarcey, the "dean of French critics,"[33] published a tepid review in *Le Temps* that dismisses the play as having "no rapport, close or distant, with dramatic art" and complains that "the boredeom it generates is insupportable."[34] Only one critic, writing for *L'Echo de Paris*, wrote specifically of the prop, recalling the spectacle of Salome holding the prop aloft "by the ears in order to passionately, even savagely kiss it."[35] But unlike subsequent productions of *Salome* in the first decade of the twentieth century, Lugné-Poe's was not criticized for its staging of the play's climax. "Remarkably," Tydeman and Price observe, "the audience . . . seems to have remained oblivious to the various backstage disasters."[36] By oblivious, these critics mean "silent." And silence surrounding any *Salome* production's approach to the play's final tableau is, indeed, remarkable. We could interpret obliviousness as evidence of success: the head did not distract. It is possible, though, that a willing suspension of disbelief was maintained precisely (and paradoxically) because the distraction was tonally coherent. In other words, the injuries sustained by the *Musée Grévin*'s once-realistic loaner dummy meant that this stage prop fit seamlessly into the play's overarching tonality. When, in 1896, Lina Munte as Salome bent to caress her cracked dummy head, the prop may have elicited little comment because, in looking wrong, it looked right.

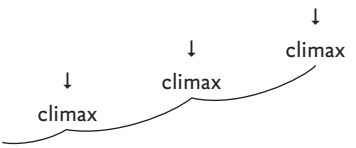
Observing in 1888 that, when presented onstage, "flesh impose[s] upon the audience an obsession which makes illusion impossible or very difficult," the novelist and mime Paul Margueritte anticipated the aesthetic investments of Maeterlinck, Gordon Craig, W. B. Yeats, and other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dramatists in championing "impersonal puppets, creatures of wood and cardboard, [that] possess a strange and mysterious life."[37] If a fleshly, embodied stage aesthetic—as manifested by realistic sets, props, and acting styles—paradoxically makes "illusion impossible," an aesthetic of disembodiment becomes the dramatic portal to the strange and mysterious. The spectacle of the actor Lina Munte making love to a mass of patched wax maintains this commitment to anti-realist aesthetics as a route to sublime transport. For audiences even slightly familiar with such high

symbolist aesthetic theories, Lugné-Poe's patchwork head would have fit seamlessly into a play critics have described as the "pre-eminent text of Symbolist drama, not only in its stylistic purity but also in its metatheatrical allegorization of what Symbolist literature is."[38] By spotlighting a decapitated Iokanaan more reminiscent of marionette than morgue, the Œuvre's 1896 *Salome* production seems to have sidestepped the critique leveled at almost all subsequent *Salome* productions in the first decades of the twentieth century, namely, that the use of a realistic prop head violated and vulgarized the militant anti-realist aesthetic that critical consensus agreed was the play's signature dramatic accomplishment.

In their chronological survey of *Salome* productions from 1896 to 1990, Tydeman and Price identify the Lugné-Poe Œuvre production as "proleptic" because "in each of the first two London productions, in 1905 and 1906, [critics] considered the performance to be seriously weakened when the artificiality of the head became too apparent to the audience."[39] The first of these productions was mounted by the New Stage Club, a subscription-only society founded in 1905 as an offshoot of London's experimental Literary Theater Club. Such private companies offered a way to foster literary drama without fear of censorship, working to reform and revitalize English drama by "pioneer[ing] a 'theatre of ideas' and a 'theatre of beauty.'"[40] The actress and musician Florence Farr directed the New Stage Club's two May 1905 performances of *Salome* at the Bijoux Theatre in Bayswater. Given Farr's devotion (in collaboration with W. B. Yeats) to sonic innovation on the modern stage, it is odd that this production was found lacking in musical accompaniment; one reviewer observed that the play "ought to have a musical accompaniment throughout, something vague and melancholy and persuasive, which might make us dream," without which "we never for one moment can dream, or, at all events, we could not last night."[41] Perhaps Farr's enthusiasm for chanted verse drama meant that in her production of *Salome* Wilde's words themselves were meant to stand in for musical accompaniment.

If this was the case, Farr's experiment was lost on her audience: her preference for artifice in vocal delivery drew broad critical ire. Writing in his capacity as theater and music critic for the *London Daily News*, E. A. Baughan rejected the "atmosphere" of the play as "heavy with scented and coloured language describing super-sensual thoughts." Dismissing Salome herself as "a shadow," Baughan observes that because all of the characters "speak in Wilde's luxuriant imagery," the drama "fades away."[42] Wilde's "encrusted" language makes the play "so artificial and dull that it creates no strong im-

pression at all—only that it should not be performed." W. B. Yeats, after attending this production, pronounced the play "thoroughly bad" for similar reasons:

> The general construction is all right, is even powerful, but the dialogue is empty, sluggish & pretentious. It has nothing of drama of any kind, never working to any climax but always ending as it began. A good play goes like this
>
> 
>
>
> but 'Salome' is as level as a table. [Wilde] thought he was writing beautifully when he had collected beautiful things and thrown them together in a heap.[43]

This "artificial, dull" heaping together of language and symbol, and the protracted affective response the heap inspires, is exactly the point.[44] The impression that the play "should not be performed" is in fact an impression—a meta-aesthetic meditation the play sets up throughout and cements in its final moments, when one artificial tonality collides with another.

Baughan particularly objected to the New Stage Club's dummy head and the way the prop broke his willing suspension of disbelief: "The long soliloquy of Salomé over the head of Iokanaan . . . would be disgusting if one could really feel the right thrill. But there are limits to the illusion of the theatre, and the imagination refuses to accept the severed head, or a woman who desires to bite its cold lips in her ecstasy of thwarted passion."[45] In an account of the production published under the bylines "Not Fit for the Stage" and "Simply Horrible," the *Lancashire Evening Post*'s theater critic identifies, and rejects, the Bijoux *Salome*'s final tableaux as an attempt at the avant-garde: "Obtaining [the head], she fondles the ghastly face, which is brought to her on a silver dish, and kisses the lips denied her in life. It is simply horrible. This is the climax of the play." "If this be the aim of 'Independent' societies," the review continues, "if this be the drama of our emancipation, give us slavery, give us the regular theatre of milk-and-water, the cup-and-saucer comedy held up for our derision."[46]

In the most lengthy and considered review of this first English *Salome*, Max Beerbohm agreed with Baughan that Wilde's final soliloquy and the prop it demands together make "mischief" for any stage production, and Farr's

was no exception. Writing for the *Saturday Review*, Beerbohm observes that "the mischief, for me, lay in the quality of the acting and of the stage management; and, deeper, it lay in my conviction that not even the best acting and the best stage-management could make this play so good to see as it is good to read."[47] Beerbohm's reasoning hinges on the final scene, one "too horrible for definite and corporeal presentment. It should be seen only through the haze of our imagination."[48] We can read of Salome's "bitter triumph" and feel "the thrill of horror which tragedy may rightly inflict on us. But *when we see the thing*," Beerbohm observes, "when we have it illustrated to us in sharp detail by a human being—then we suffer something beyond the rightful tragic thrill: we suffer qualms of physical disgust."[49] Because all stage productions of *Salome* necessarily demand such visual illustration, Beerbohm argues, none can avoid producing this disgust—an affective response at once aesthetic and physical.

With the "right kind of acting, the right kind of stage-management," however, disgust might be mitigated. The choices made for the Bijoux Theatre production, Beerbohm argues, only exacerbated this feeling. Rather than keep Salome at the back of the stage when she is given the head, thus covering both actress and object in shadows, "in the Bijoux Theatre, Salomé brought the head briskly down to the footlights, and in that glare delivered to it all her words and kisses." "This was wrong," Beerbohm laments, "not merely because it intensified our physical disgust, but also because it destroyed all our illusion." Indeed, the destruction of illusion seems to be the root cause of Beerbohm's feelings of disgust in the face of what he describes as "not the head of a prophet, but simply a thing of painted cardboard—a 'property' prepared with much labor and ingenuity." Knowing that the head was a "fake," an "unpleasant thing," is for Beerbohm the crowning horror: "Cold cardboard lips kissed passionately by a young lady . . . are really a more horrible spectacle for us than they would be if we believed for the moment that in truth Salomé were kissing the lips of John the Baptist."[50]

Beerbohm's rationale for his physical disgust upon seeing this "thing of painted cardboard" anticipates Masahiro Mori's theory of the "uncanny valley," which accounts for that particular feeling of revulsion one experiences in the presence of an object that almost, but not quite, reproduces the look of a real human being. Mori theorized that whereas humans feel increasing affinity for nonhuman objects the more human they appear, this affinity crashes into a precipitous dip or "valley" of disgust and revulsion when such objects come nearest to approximating human life.[51] In her afterword to

Ugly Feelings, Ngai reminds us that for Kant, disgust stands as the "single exception to representational art's otherwise unlimited power to beautify things which are ugly or displeasing in real life."[52] Only one form of ugliness "cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetical satisfaction, and consequently artificial beauty, viz. that which excites *disgust*."[53] The disgust Max Beerbohm felt upon witnessing *Salome*'s final moments at the New Stage Club was born of an encounter with an aesthetic object "represented in accordance with nature" whose very naturalistic artifice "destroy[ed] all aesthetical satisfaction."

But was this moment of aesthetic rupture ineffective? After all, the object in question is only disgusting when juxtaposed to the supremely artificial beauty of Salome herself, and *Salome* as a whole. If, for Francis Bacon, all beauty is compounded of some strangeness, what are the compounds of beauty's opposite?[54] This "thing of painted cardboard" destroys aesthetic satisfaction and in so doing provokes aesthetic reflection, precisely because it is commonplace. And for Wilde—reversing Bacon—there can be no excellent ugliness that hath not some banality. Tydeman and Price are certainly right to highlight the controversy that arose in response to the head prop used in this first London production as an "early and crucial recognition of the precariousness of the theatrical illusion in *Salome*."[55] Yet we need not be quick to conclude, as they do, that this precariousness "support[s] the logical view that *Salome* requires for its successful production" a unified symbolist approach, one that sidesteps such feelings of disgust by facilitating "the kind of illusion for which Beerbohm called."[56]

The artist Charles Ricketts seems to have been on the fence about how to handle the warring aesthetic tonalities of *Salome*. Ricketts had collaborated with Wilde in the early 1890s on designs for a possible Paris production of the play, and he carried these ideas into a second London production, this one mounted in June 1906 along with Wilde's *Florentine Tragedy* by the newly formed London Stage Society. This society evolved from a 1901 dinner conversation between Ricketts and Thomas Sturge Moore, the details of which Ricketts preserved in his diary: "T.S. Moore to grub. We discussed the possibility of the foundation of a Theatre society for Romantic Drama . . . in which the scenery would be done on a new decorative, almost symbolic principle. I have half a mind to write a pamphlet on this subject which has haunted me for years."[57] This haunting likely began in 1891, when Wilde tapped him to develop designs for the Paris production of *Salome* that never materialized.[58] Given the "decorative, symbolic principle" upon which the

London Stage Society was founded, an abstract prophet's head would have seemed a logical approach for Ricketts's 1906 production. But abstract was not the approach Ricketts chose.

In early May 1906, Ricketts took a break from designing his beautifully suggestive costumes for *Salome*—made of "silver tissues threaded with black and with red"[59]—to visit "the theatrical property man," a "character, lodged in a funny old building in a litter of cardboard, rags, and paper." Unlike a "dapper clerk from the office below [who] complain[ed] that the mess of paper on the staircase was 'something cruel,' " Ricketts was "charmed by the place" and its suggestive jumble of materials, which included "two life-sized toy soldiers, masks of frogs, buckets of plaster, and a litter of tinsel and rags."[60] Ricketts was well aware of Beerbohm's lengthy review of the 1905 Bijoux *Salome*, and his extensive background in drawing, sculpture, costume, and set design meant that he certainly had the creative capacity to mount a production that sidestepped the play's famously precarious aesthetic traps. But despite the possibilities suggested by outsized toys, frog masks, glitter, and plaster, in the end Ricketts followed the precedent set by Farr and Lugné-Poe before him, commissioning a naturalistic prop for his *Salome*'s denouement.

For the most part, the production succeeded: Ricketts's *Salome* was universally praised for its beauty, delicacy, and fantasy. Writing for the *Speaker*, Desmond McCarthy raved, "If men like Charles Ricketts and Sturge Moore had the setting and management of more plays in their hands, romantic and poetic pieces might prove often, instead of seldom, sources of astonishment and delight."[61] But McCarthy also noted (perceptively, as this essay claims) that *Salome* is a play in which "two inconsistent atmospheres are mixed together," the result being that "with Salome and John the Baptist before your eyes you are astonished that such abandonment and exultation of language should leave you so cold. And since the expression and rhythm is often masterly, you are half persuaded for the moment that all literature must be a fake."

Writing again for the *Saturday Review*, Max Beerbohm disagreed with McCarthy that the play's "exultation of language" fails because it is overly artificial. In fact, in this second review of *Salome* in just over a year, Beerbohm praises the play's "deliberate slowness" as a formal innovation, whereby dramatic movement is arrested to afford audiences time in which to "realise more intensely the horror of what is in store." Slow, decorative flourishes, such as "Herod's descriptions of the jewels and the peacocks and the various

other things that Salome might take instead of the one thing that she demands," do not allow us to forget this horror; instead, "they do but give us time to become uncomfortable."[62] It is important to note that here Beerbohm entertains the idea that the discomfort of tedium might have its aesthetic uses: here is a kind of productive discomfort Beerbohm finds intellectually interesting, if not aesthetically appealing. Not so the discomfort he again testifies to having felt at the end of this 1906 production. Praising Ricketts's stage management overall ("As the scenery and the dresses were designed by Mr. Charles Ricketts, it need not be said they were beautiful"), Beerbohm ends his review by again zeroing in on the head as the play's chief problem to solve:

> The stage-management was faulty only in the final scene, and that, alas, is the scene where perfection is most needed. Not even the quality of Miss Darragh's acting could wholly purge our physical disgust. It is obvious that Salome ought to be in the far background, and in deepest shadow, while she holds in her hands the head of the prophet. This would not merely militate against physical disgust. It would aid illusion. When we distinctly see the head, we are conscious of its unreality, however realistically it be made. And our consciousness of its unreality does not make it one whit the less unpleasant.[63]

Despite commissioning a naturalistic head for his *Salome*, Ricketts tried to mitigate against such a reaction. Before the opening night performance on 10 June 1906, he records having repeatedly "rehearsed taking of head with Miss Darragh," who responded to her director's intensity over the prop by "growing nervous" and ultimately failing to execute his blocking: "Audience enthusiastic. Three calls at the end of the *Florentine Tragedy*, four at the end of *Salome.* Herod almost collapsing after the curtain was down. Dance begun too soon, over too soon. Salome missed covering the head of St. John with a veil."[64] Despite Ricketts's best attempts, audience awareness of the 1906 head's unreality intensified, rather than alleviated, feelings of boredom and disgust. And Max Beerbohm would likely have agreed with Desmond McCarthy that in this one instance the production indeed suffered from "two inconsistent atmospheres . . . mixed together." Yet Beerbohm's persistent call for a more perfect—because less representational—conclusion to Wilde's play was not heeded by subsequent productions.

On Tuesday, 22 January 1907, Richard Strauss's *Salome* opened at the New York Metropolitan Opera House. In rehearsals for months and produced with lavish sets and established operatic performers, this first American

production of Strauss's opera was eagerly anticipated, and ticket sales were brisk. The *Times* credited the already-established reputation of *Salome*, both the original play and Strauss's opera, as the reason for this sold-out debut. Strauss's adaptation of Oscar Wilde's libretto had been, since its Dresden premiere in December 1905, at the "storm center of the musical world," prompting heated discussion on numerous topics, grouped and articulated by the *New York Times* as the play's "repugnant features of realism, its alleged immorality, decadent spirit, artistic perversity."[65] Reviewing the Metropolitan *Salome* the day after its premiere, the *New York Times* reported that ten extra policemen had been employed to "handle the crowds," described as a "vast audience, tense with a sort of foreboding expectancy as well as with evident and hesitant interest." Widespread knowledge of the opera's "many sensational features" attracted a "throng of men and women such as no previous opera had drawn to the Metropolitan."

Strauss's *Salome* builds slowly, as does Wilde's play, and the many first-time operagoers who purchased their tickets in anticipation of a thrill soon realized that there was in fact "no sensation" for the greater part of the performance.[66] One eyewitness described the audience as "beginning to be bored."[67] But once Salome's dance began, the atmosphere inside the Metropolitan changed. In the front rows and boxes, many women "turned away" from the spectacle, "twist[ing] in their chairs," and "very few men in the audience seemed comfortable."[68] This initial discomfort intensified into a physical urge to flee when, "following the lines of Wilde's play," the American Wagnerian Olive Fremstad "began to sing to the head." A large contingent in the front row recoiled from "the horror of the thing," and joined by men and women "from Boxes 27 and 29 in the Golden Horseshoe," these season ticket holders "tumbled precipitously into the corridors," calling for their carriages. Those in the galleries left their seats to stand at the balcony edge, "so that they might look down on the prima donna as she kissed the dead lips of the head of John the Baptist." The *Times* account ends, "Then they sank back into their chairs and shuddered."[69]

Given this overall positive review of *Salome*'s one-night run, the reviewer's choice to end on the image of an audience sharing a collective "shudder" could suggest a rare moment of unanimous satisfaction with a much-maligned prop. But another review that appeared in the *Theatre* tells a different story: "As predicted by *The Theatre* a year ago, the performance in New York of Richard Strauss's one-act opera *Salome* aroused a tempest of protest."[70] Citing the outraged calls for the production to close after one performance—

including calls from W. K. Vanderbilt and J. P. Morgan, who "declared that he would rather refund from his own pocket the entire cost of the production than have another performance given within the walls of the Opera House"—the *Theatre* reported that the manager was powerless and the production was shut down after its opening performance, but for different reasons than one might suppose: "It was not a matter, as its apologists pretended, of splitting hairs on the ground of immorality. Salome in her transports of rage and gross sensuality is no less respectable a person than the Sapphos, the Zazas, the Mrs. Warrens and other red-light heroines of the contemporary stage. It was not the character of Salome nor her voluptuous dance of the Seven Veils that offended. It was the repulsive grewsomeness [*sic*], the shuddering horror of the woman fondling a decapitated head that sickened the public stomach."[71] In an interview published after the "wealthy men who own[ed] the Metropolitan Opera House put their ban on 'Salome,'" the prima donna herself declared the opera's forced closure a "great pity." "We all realize that the theme is revolting," Fremstad continued, "but I am concerned with the art of it. So far as the end is concerned, Strauss glorifies that. In the Wilde play, it is only degenerate. Even in the opera, Salome is the worst sort of degenerate, but Strauss makes something more of her at the last, where she gets her idea of what love means. Her instinct towards good comes into play when she sees the head before her. . . . Strauss tells me this. Wilde tells me nothing."[72] For Fremstad, then, Strauss builds a tragic organization into his music that Wilde's libretto lacks: a final transformation of the degenerate into the romantic hero.

Yet her audience was more moved (literally) by the visual spectacle of a severed head fondled by a young woman. And this spectacle remains discordant: even if the words and music are together signaling Salome's transformation in the face of love, this face before her is an ugly thing, a material thing. It is, in a sense, pure artifice, or pure Art—defined by Wilde in 1891, the year during which he wrote *Salome*, as always a "useless" thing, whose aim "is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is sterility."[73] The "shudder" that rippled through the Metropolitan Opera when Fremstad kissed her dummy head reminds one of the shudder Edgar Saltus recalled feeling in 1891, as he read the final scene of *Salome* in manuscript form. Sitting with Wilde in a London restaurant, Saltus "shuddered, and told him that I had." "It is only the shudder that counts," was Wilde's reply.[74]

A Necessary Prop?

In late March 1908, the illustrated London journal the *Sketch* printed a striking discussion prompt, wading into what was by then a contentious and ongoing debate over how to stage *Salome*. Centered in full caps over two provocative images of Canadian dancer Maud Allan posing with "the dummy head of John the Baptist to which objection has been taken," a full-page layout asks in all caps, "IS THE HEAD A NECESSARY PROP.?" In posing this question, the *Sketch* registered another incarnation of what should by now sound like a familiar meditation on this "chose laid," this time emerging from the London premiere of Allan's fifteen-minute interpretive dance "The Vision of Salome." Characterizing the controversy over Allan's performance as arising from neither revealing costume nor provocative gyrations, but instead "from the fact that in it the dancer uses a property head of John the Baptist," the *Sketch* briefly glosses a divided critical reception. Some critics objected to the head as "an unnecessary and unwise accessory," while others maintained that without this property "some of the effect of 'The Vision' must be lost." No stranger to *Salome*, E. A. Baughan again weighed in, ending an otherwise laudatory review for the *London Daily News* by advising Allan to "discard the foolish property head." Praising the dance itself as "poetic enough" without Allan's "final bending over of the severed head of the prophet," Baughan pans the dummy head as "a bad attempt to be sensational" and "not at all thrilling."[75] But one lone critic, writing for the *Manchester Courier*, seemed to see the point of the prop, praising "the weird incident of the Saint's severed head" as engaging and important because of, not despite, its "almost painful realism."[76]

Unwise, unthrilling, and sensational? Or weirdly daring, producing an "almost painful realism" without which something is lost? When, in his 1909 introduction to *Salome*, Wilde's literary executor Robert Ross maintained that the play was never meant for the stage, he did so after witnessing this near-twenty-year debate over the form and function of *Salome*'s prop head. The "long speech at the end" of *Salome*, which Ross argues Wilde—"with his keen sense of theatre"—would have rejected as pushing the limits of audience tolerance, was itself proof that Wilde had not written the play for theatrical production.[77] What Ross here identifies as a dramatic obstacle, however, might be more interestingly understood as a "stuplime" spectacle absolutely central to the play's larger effort to, in Ngai's words, "expand our

Anonymous, "Is the Head a Necessary Prop.?," *The Sketch: A Journal of Art and Actuality* 61 (25 Mar. 1908): 3. Courtesy of the HathiTrust. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951002800457w?urlappend=%3Bseq=645.

concept of aesthetic experience in general." On paper, *Salome* seems designed to elicit intense emotion from its audiences. Onstage, it often produced boredom, irritation, discomfort, and incredulity. Salome's drawn-out monologue forces sustained focus on the ugly thing to which she speaks, and for many, this final sustained tableau breaches the limits of disbelief. But as this essay has shown, disbelief *is* an affective and critical response, another "weak affect" crucial to *Salome*'s subversive force as a stage play.

When, in 1910, the British Lord Chamberlain finally permitted a production of Strauss's *Salome* to be performed in London, the head was altogether omitted, replaced with "a blood stained sword, to which [Salome] sings."[78] And this trend continues: in Steven Berkoff's *Salome*, first performed at

Dublin's Gate Theatre in 1992, props were dispensed with altogether, with Salome delivering her monologue to the air. Because Wilde was unable to oversee a production of his play and left no description of how he wanted this crucial prop to manifest onstage, critics could easily pan the head—in all its grotesque, failed artifice—as an aesthetic misstep, a regrettable mistake to be rectified, even dispensed with. But in failing to provoke the more recognizably sublime aesthetic feelings of wonder, terror, and transcendence, the ugly things of *Salome* seek something different. As an early aesthetic experiment in deliberate tedium, dullness, and irritation, *Salome* works by not working, and by making us think about *how* it is not working. With its final tableau compounded of equal parts "enervation and shock,"[79] Wilde's decadent experiment in meta-response may have been lost on his early modernist audiences. But in the work of later twentieth-century artists, including Bertolt Brecht, Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, Andy Warhol, and John Cage, we again find artists pursuing productive aesthetic failure as catalyst for the creation of new generic forms.

Notes

1. In both the manuscript and published versions of Wilde's original play in French (Paris: Librarie de l'Art Indépendant; London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1893), both title (*Salomé*) and heroine (Salomé) are rendered with the accent aigu. However, in the English translation of Wilde's play (London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane; Boston: Copeland & Day, 1894), both title and heroine are anglicized as *Salome*/Salome. Because this essay deals largely with productions that utilize the latter spelling, I have chosen to use the unaccented "Salome" throughout.

2. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 5, *Plays 1: Duchess of Padua, Salomé: Drame en Une Acte, Salome: Tragedy in One Act*, ed. Joseph Donohue (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 730–31.

3. Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 25.

4. In using the term "tonality" here to describe broad literary movements or generic modalities, I am borrowing Sianne Ngai's "explicitly feelings-related conception" of aesthetic tone as indicating "a cultural object's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world," as expressed in *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 29.

5. Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 2011), 2.

6. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 2–3.

7. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 297.

8. Ellis Hanson, "Salome, Simile, *Symboliste*," in *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, ed. Jason David Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 144.

9. Anonymous, "Strauss's 'Salome' the First Time Here," *New York Times*, 23 Jan. 1907, 9.

10. William Archer, "The Drama," *New Review* 7, no. 39 (Aug. 1892): 249.

11. Archer, "Drama," 250.

12. Anonymous, "Music and the Drama," *Glasgow Herald*, 4 July 1892, 9.

13. Edward Pigott to Spencer Ponsonby, 27 June 1892; italics in the original. Quoted in John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824–1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 112.

14. Stephens, *Censorship of English Drama*, 112.

15. Archer, "Drama," 251.

16. Richard Allen Cave, "Wilde Designs: Some Thoughts about Recent British Productions of His Plays," *Modern Drama* 37, no. 1 (1994): 177.

17. Cave, "Wilde Designs," 180.

18. Joseph Donohue, "Wilde in France: The '*Salomé*' Typescript, Sarah Bernhardt and the Production That Never Was," *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 Sept. 2015, 14–15.

19. Wilde, *Complete Works*, 5:716.

20. Oscar Wilde, "Typescript of Salome to Pierre Louys" (manuscript, Free Library of Philadelphia, 1894).

21. Wilde, "Typescript of Salome to Pierre Louys," 50 (verso).

22. Joseph Donohue, "*Salomé*: Introduction," in Wilde, *Complete Works*, 5:457.

23. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 3, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 13. In the revised and expanded 1891 edition, Wilde's only change to this line is to replace the word "bestial" with "vulgar" to describe late nineteenth-century realism (177).

24. Wilde, "Typescript of Salome to Pierre Louys," 63–64.

25. Hanson, "Salome, Simile, *Symboliste*," 145.

26. Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 93.

27. Wilde, "Typescript of Salome to Pierre Louys," 62 (verso). My thanks to Joseph Donohue for offering his time and expertise to assist me in crafting an informed theory as to when Wilde made this crucial deletion.

28. For more on thing theory, see Bill Brown's special issue of *Critical Inquiry* entitled "Things" (vol. 28, no. 1, 2001).

29. William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 26.

30. Gertrude Jasper, *Adventure in the Theatre*: *Lugné-Poe and the Theatre de l'Ouevre* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1948), 110.

31. Aurélien Lugné-Poe, *La Parade*, vol. 2, *Acrobaties: souvenirs et impressions de théâtre (1894–1902)* (Paris: Librarie Gallimard, 1931), 475.

32. Lugné-Poe, *La Parade*, 152.

33. Donohue, "*Salomé*: Introduction," 475.

34. Quoted in Donohue, "*Salomé*: Introduction," 476.

35. Quoted in Claire Rowden, "Whose/Who's Salome? Natalia Trouhanowa, a Dancing Diva," in *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories*, ed. Claire Rowden (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 83.

36. Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 28.

37. Quoted in Edward Braun, *The Director and the Stage: From Naturalism to Grotowski* (London: A & C Black, 1986), 40–41.

38. Hanson, "Salome, Simile, *Symboliste*," 144.

39. Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 28.

40. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard, "Historical and Biographical Appendix," in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 3, *1901–1904* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 721.

41. Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 42.

42. E. A. Baughan, "The New Stage Club: Oscar Wilde's *Salome*," *London Daily News*, 11 May 1905, 8.

43. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard, eds., *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 4, *1905–1907* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 399.

44. In "A Theatre of the Head: Material Culture, Severed Heads, and the Late Drama of W. B. Yeats," *Modern Drama* 58, no. 4 (2015), Paige Reynolds examines the significance of the severed head prop to W. B. Yeats's late plays (including *The King of the Great Clock Tower* [1934], *A Full Moon in March* [1935], and *The Death of Cuchulain* [1939]), arguing that in this prop Yeats found a potent stage object whose "residual subjectivity resists, but does not mitigate against, its stubborn factuality" (438).

45. Baughan, "New Stage Club," 8.

46. Unsigned review, "From All Quarters," *Lancashire Evening Post*, 12 May 1905, 5.

47. Max Beerbohm, review of *Salome* at the New Stage Club, *Saturday Review*, 13 May 1905, 692.

48. Beerbohm, review of *Salome* at the New Stage Club, 693.

49. Beerbohm, review of *Salome* at the New Stage Club, 693; italics added.

50. Beerbohm, review of *Salome* at the New Stage Club, 693.

51. Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley" (1970), trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Takashi Minato, *IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine* 19, no. 2 (2012): 98–100.

52. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 334.

53. Quoted in Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 334.

54. Sir Francis Bacon, "Of Beauty," in *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985), 132–33.

55. Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 43.

56. Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 43.

57. Charles Ricketts, *Self Portrait: Taken from the Letters and Journals of Charles Ricketts*, ed. Cecil Lewis (London: Peter Davies, 1939), 52.

58. For more on these conversations between Wilde and Ricketts on the design for a possible Paris production of *Salome*, see Charles Ricketts, *Recollections of Oscar Wilde* (London: Pallas Athene, 1921), 50–54.

59. Ricketts, *Self-Portrait*, 136.

60. Ricketts, *Self-Portrait*, 135.

61. Desmond McCarthy, "Oscar Wilde and the Literary Theatre Club," *Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 7 July 1906, 315–16.

62. Max Beerbohm, "A Florentine Tragedy and Salome," *Saturday Review*, 16 June 1906, 751.

63. Beerbohm, "Florentine Tragedy and Salome," 752.

64. Ricketts, *Self-Portrait*, 136–37.

65. Anonymous, "Strauss's 'Salome' the First Time Here," *New York Times*, 23 Jan. 1907, 9.

66. Anonymous, "Strauss's 'Salome' the First Time Here," 9.

67. W. J. Henderson, "The 'Salome' of Strauss," *New York Sun*, 27 Jan. 1907, 8.

68. Anonymous, "Strauss's 'Salome' the First Time Here," 9.

69. Anonymous, "Strauss's 'Salome' the First Time Here," 9.

70. Anonymous, "Salome at the Metropolitan Opera House," *Theatre Magazine* 7, no. 73 (Mar. 1907): 70.

71. Anonymous, "Salome at the Metropolitan Opera House," 71.

72. Anonymous, "Take Off 'Salome,' Say Opera House Directors," *New York Times*, 27 Jan. 1907, 2.

73. Oscar Wilde, "To R. Clegg," Apr. 1891, in *Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 478.

74. Edgar Saltus, *Oscar Wilde: An Idler's Impression* (Chicago: Brothers of the Book, 1917), 22.

75. E. A. Baughan, review of "Vision of Salome," *London Daily News*, 7 Mar. 1908, 4.

76. Anonymous, review of "Vision of Salome," *Manchester Courier*, 7 Mar. 1908, 6.

77. Robert Ross, preface to *Salomé, La Sainte Courtisane, A Florentine Tragedy*, by Oscar Wilde (London: Methuen, 1909), viii.

78. Anne Sivuoja-Kauppala, "Salome's Slow Dance with the Lord Chamberlain, London 1909–10," in *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories*, ed. Claire Rowden (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 109.

79. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 263.

3 Decadent Paths and Percolations after 1895

Nick Freeman

An Evil Influence

On 24 May 1895, Queen Victoria's seventy-sixth birthday, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labor. Three days later, the *Daily Telegraph* was still gloating over his downfall, hoping that "the grave of contemptuous oblivion may rest on his foolish ostentation, his empty paradoxes, his insufferable posturing, his incurable vanity."[1]

The conservative newspaper's denunciatory rhetoric extended beyond Wilde to address what its editorial saw as regrettable, even distressing trends in contemporary culture: it was impossible to imagine a "falser or more foolish sentiment" than art for art's sake.[2] Worse still was the "school of Decadents and Aesthetes," which wielded an "evil influence on all the better tendencies of art and literature" and encouraged a "marked preference for the unnatural, the sensual, the erotic [and] unhealthy passion." The legal judgment would force "young men and maidens, the students whose zeal outruns their sobriety, the writers who yearn to show themselves unconventional and daring" to "review the principles on which they work and think." "It is far better," the *Telegraph* concluded, "to overtax the brain by reading, and to strain the muscles of the heart by excessive athletics, than to worship false ideals of art and life, and to seek to shift the unalterable standards of right and wrong"[3] Numerous commentators followed suit, publicly and privately, but any hopes they may have had that decadence had been banished when Justice Wills banged his gavel and Wilde asked forlornly, "And I my lord? May I say nothing?" were to be disappointed. English decadence was a more complex phenomenon than its simplistic equation with Wilde could allow, and although *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891) marked for some the moment when aestheticism began to decay into some-

thing altogether more troubling, he was not the originator of the Hydra, merely one of its more elegantly coiffured heads. In the decades that followed his imprisonment, many new ones would grow.

For all that decadence persisted after 1895, however, it was a term undeniably tainted by its Wildean associations, the intertwining of the playwright's sexual and artistic peccadilloes, widely considered to be physically, morally, and intellectually corrupting. His self-consciously Neronian performance of uninhibited appetites—ortolans, Perrier-Jouët champagne, opium-tainted cigarettes, teenage renters—and the reckless expenditure that fed them were having serious consequences for his health before the trials,[4] all of which left him, according to Arthur Machen, a "pendulous" creature hung with "rosy fat" who resembled "an obese old Frenchwoman . . . dressed up in man's clothes."[5] "Pleasure is the only thing one should live for," Wilde claimed, but his espousal of hedonist philosophy jarred with the reality of luxurious binges in West End restaurants and hotels.[6] "I know nothing of the Savoy," said Wills in his final address to the court, "but I must say that in my view, 'Chicken and Salad for two, 16s.' is very high. I am afraid I shall never have supper there myself."[7]

This physical decadence and the illegality of homoerotic desire (magnified by transgression of class and age boundaries) were paralleled by provocative intellectual activity. Wilde's paradoxes were not straightforwardly satirical, for they rarely had explicitly corrective aims. Instead, revealing how he may have conducted tutorials had he ever secured an academic position, they posed questions that forced his audiences to think critically about their morals and beliefs. Why should art seek to be anything other than "quite useless"?[8] Why might ambition be considered "the last refuge of the failure"?[9] "Anything that stimulates thought in people of any age is good for them," Wilde told the court at the Queensberry libel trial.[10] So many of his "maxims" and "phrases and philosophies" need only "discuss" on the end of them to serve as "questions which the wise cannot answer" in examinations.[11] At times, Wilde saw himself in quasi-Socratic terms, echoing how Socrates had told the Athenians that he was "a sort of gadfly" who "stirred into life" the "great and noble steed" of the state. "I am always fastening upon you," he continued, "arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me."[12] Wilde similarly refused to accept the complacent assumptions of a dominant imperial culture, even as he took advantage of the material riches that it afforded. In *Dorian Gray*, this was not hypocrisy but insincerity, "merely a means by which we can multiply

our personalities" and become more interesting to ourselves and others.[13] Wilde's punishment was at once the consequence of his formal lawbreaking and the retaliatory violence of an establishment goaded by his elegant disdain for so many of its values and conventions. As with Socrates, his influence was felt most strongly (and dangerously) by young male intellectuals. Although it is unwise to overextend the analogy—Bosie Douglas was hardly Alcibiades—one could see Wilde's ideas, and, perhaps more notably, his epigrammatic reformulations of other people's, as operating in strikingly similar ways to the provocative performances of the Athenian philosopher, even if he left no Plato to continue his work. As Max Beerbohm observed in *Zuleika Dobson* (1911), "The Socratic manner is not a game at which two can play."[14]

This multifaceted figuring of decadence helps explain what happened to the concept in the years following Wilde's social and actual deaths. The intellectual and artistic associations of the movement became relegated to an earlier historical epoch, typically the first half of the 1890s, or, as W. B. Yeats archly decreed, 1900, "when everyone got down off his stilts . . . nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic Church; or if they did I have forgotten."[15] At the same time, pleasure seeking, self-indulgence, and attendant fiscal irresponsibility became "decadent" in other ways, stripped of a serious connection to art and made frivolous and/or self-destructive. Hedonists and moralists alike used the term to refer to alcoholic, narcotic, and sexual excess at Frida Strindberg's London nightclub, the Cave of the Golden Calf (1912–14), less interested in its avant-garde decoration, furnishings, and performances than in rumors of its patrons' outrageous behavior.

What follows considers the ways some of these differing aspects of decadence permeated British culture in the first third of the twentieth century, suggesting that there was considerable semantic slippage around the term, and that many of its most notable qualities persisted without always being formally recognized.

Isolating the Phenomenon

Reviewing John Lane's edition of Ernest Dowson's complete poems for the *TLS* in 1905, E. V. Lucas attacked the ways in which the poet had "flouted most of the Commandments" and succumbed to "Verlainitis, a comparatively harmless complaint in Paris but a fatal disease in this country"—hardly tasteful in view of Dowson's death from tuberculosis.[16] Eight years later, a

review of Holbrook Jackson's landmark history, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, saw the paper renew its concern with disease and pathology. In "The Yellow 'Nineties," Francis Gribble focused on how Jackson prioritized an evanescent minority movement above scientific romance or anglicized forms of naturalism, paying greater attention to decadence than to the perhaps equally worthy causes of H. G. Wells and George Gissing. Gribble seemed uninterested in the book's discussion of Francis Thompson, Rudyard Kipling, George Bernard Shaw, or the Kelmscott Press, drawn instead to its early chapters on Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and "The Decadence." He may have claimed that the decade was "a literary period which it is just beginning to be possible to see in its true perspective and examine without prejudice," but his protestations of objectivity were questionable.[17] It was clearly decadence and its implications for Georgian literary culture that he wished to investigate.

Gribble's review was notable for its tentative epidemiological connotations in figuring decadence as infectious. "Perhaps it was necessary to isolate the phenomenon in order to estimate its importance," he wrote, "though the mere fact of isolation may seem to give it an importance which it did not really possess."[18] English opponents (and sometimes exponents) of decadence often evoked it through images of disease and contagion, whether it be "Verlainitis," Tennyson's worries about "poisonous honey" bringing its sweet sickness across the Channel, Arthur Symons's characterization of decadence as a "beautiful and interesting disease," or Wilde's frequent use of "poisonous" as a term of praise.[19] Newspaper editorials that depicted Wilde's solitary confinement as a kind of sexual and cultural quarantine were a more extreme expression of this tendency. However, what seemed at first to be a life-threatening illness caused little lasting harm to the late Victorian body politic. As Gribble points out, the Boer Wars soon altered the mood of the nation from "art-for-art's-sake" to "fighting-for-fighting's-sake." Overshadowed by the urgencies of imperial politics, decadence was, it seemed, a fad, an interlude of negligible significance, or, as Gribble put it in a bizarrely antipodean image, "a billabong which we know will presently be extinguished in the sands."[20]

Gribble went further than Jackson in simultaneously limiting the spread of the infection and trivializing the disease. In this context, it is significant that the *TLS* is a product of the early twentieth century, beginning publication in January 1902 and therefore not appearing on Victorian newsstands alongside the *Yellow Book* or the *Savoy*.[21] It was quite self-conscious in re-

garding itself as a departure from the more provocative periodicals of earlier days; tellingly, it was one of the few important English reviews of the time that did not feature contributions by Symons.[22] In rejecting these elements of the previous decade, the *TLS* generally paid little attention to decadence until it had reconfigured it as a historical phenomenon in reviews of memoirs and histories by Bernard Muddiman, Osbert Burdett, and others after 1918. It was equally uninterested in late Victorians such as William Watson who were failing to come to terms with the new century and, keen to put distance between itself and the earlier period, dismissed Symons's *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* as a "relic of 'Yellow Bookery.'"[23] Its sympathies lay with an emergent poetic generation and those novelists and playwrights coming to prominence in the years following Victoria's death: H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, Shaw, J. M. Barrie, John Galsworthy, Harley Granville-Barker. The *Times* had never been a friend to decadence, and the sense of a "clean break" engineered by the early editors of its literary supplement—first James Thursfield, a naval historian, and then Bruce Richmond (editor 1902–37)—may suggest that it sought to be a new magazine for the new century, issuing forth on a distinctly different road from its predecessors and rivals. However, we may also sense something of what Linda Dowling memorably termed the "parthenogenesis of the avant-garde," a process by which parentage is disavowed and writers and artists insist on being judged on their self-creation rather than on the negotiations and compromises inherent in their dialogues with tradition.[24] In the years leading up to the First World War, the *TLS* constructed a version of literary history that confined decadence largely to the 1890s. It ignored significant work by figures from that decade who were still active, failing to review Symons's *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) or Machen's *The Hill of Dreams* (1907), and when it spotted new outbreaks of the disease, it acted swiftly to snuff them out.[25] A quaint feature of colonial topography, the billabong either ran dry in the sands or dribbled forlornly into a stagnant pool.

One such pool was the first collection by the poet Edmund John, *The Flute of Sardonyx*, which the theater critic Harold Hannyngton Child reviewed in the summer of 1913.[26] Published by the new firm of Herbert Jenkins in a design strongly reminiscent of John Lane's poetry list of the 1890s, the book came with a foreword by the rapidly waning Stephen Phillips (who would die in December 1915).[27] Its lurid "Salome" proved controversial almost immediately, necessitating the excision of one stanza following complaints by the journalist James Douglas.[28] As the editor of *Poetry Review*, Phillips

maintained that John was strongly influenced by Keats, but Child was unimpressed by verse he considered derivative and outdated, observing that "favourite adjectives" were "wan," "wild," "mad," and "strange," backed up by overalliteration. "Macabre as some strange sickness of the soul" was, so far as Child was concerned, "a battered poetical halfpenny, put into circulation from the 'aesthetic' mint of thirty years ago," and, though he does not say so, clearly associated with works such as *Dorian Gray*. John was "seduced by tempting clichés" because his verse lacked "deep and sincere feeling," as well as "rigorous self-criticism." The lines "Your young voice, I know not how, / Seemed sweet with sorrow from unsaddened lands" left Child especially appalled owing to the "abominable hissing" of its concluding sibilants and its stale familiarity in the age of John Masefield and Walter de la Mare. "It makes one rub one's eyes and look at the calendar," he said, for it was "exactly how all the young poets used to write twenty years ago, when the models were Swinburne and Rossetti, and Simeon Solomon hung on undergraduates' walls, and there was a good deal of unwholesome nonsense talked about 'sin' and 'paganism.' " Child does not use the word "decadence," but he clearly intends to distinguish between aesthetes such as Swinburne, his followers from the 1890s (Dowson, for example), and the latter's decayed progeny who aped their manner and preoccupations. Phillips, who had briefly been regarded as the finest poetic dramatist since Shakespeare, found the lines "quite lovely," feeling that "only a poet, and no mere verse-writer, could have penned" them, but Child made it clear that tastes had changed, and he mocked the affectations of John's speakers.[29] The "portrait of the beginning of this volume," said Child, "proclaims him much younger than an inexperienced reader might guess from the seared and battered condition of his heart, or soul" announced in his poetry. John had followed "evil courses" and been led astray, like the effete undergraduate in Kipling's "The 'Mary Gloster' " (1894), who "dabbled with books an' pictures, an' china an' etchin's an' fans" and whose college room "was beastly—more like a whore's than a man's."[30]

Despite the best efforts of Timothy d'Arch Smith and, more recently, Michael Matthew Kaylor, John remains an obscure figure.[31] He was involved with Uranianism but hymned a wider variety of transgressive amours and practices than was usual among sentimentally inclined boy lovers. Necrophilia, masturbation, lesbianism, and Salome fix his work in the first half of the 1890s. The last of these may have given Phillips "a kind of unlawful thrill," but more sober critics noted that John's alliterative flourishes were

Swinburnian, his favorite adjectives owed much to Pater, and his fondness for elaborate stanza forms, weariness, and regret came from Dowson (himself an acolyte of Swinburne and Pater).[32] His all-pervading interest in sin and the pagan world, meanwhile, seems a general debt to the period, recalling Wilde's "Tired Hedonists" in "The Decay of Lying" (1891), who wear "faded roses" in their buttonholes and venerate Domitian. *The Flute of Sardonyx* was, to borrow from *Dorian Gray*, "a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain."[33]

In preferring to dwell on errors of scansion rather than the content of the poems that contained them, Child's review unwittingly separated art from morality, a tendency the *TLS* condemned elsewhere. Nevertheless, it was apparent that *The Flute of Sardonyx* underlined a stylistic bankruptcy even as it showed how writers remained drawn to the subject matter that inspired their "decadent" predecessors. John expressed the "unwholesome" content of his verse in a bygone (yet apparently still offensive) fashion, but while Child wished to condemn and demolish his work, he was inclined to praise the writer reviewed alongside him, James Elroy Flecker. Child saw Flecker's *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* as "sincere, clean art," even as others saw him as the successor to 1890s lyricists. The word "decadent" was a heavy stone to throw, and harder still to throw accurately.[34]

John's poetry was to Swinburne's as Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Requiem* is to Gabriel Fauré's. His "strange swift sorrow" and a desolate garden's "ruin of rain and waste of weary wind" revealed his obvious familiarity with Swinburne's "A Forsaken Garden" (1878) and Dowson's "The Garden of Shadow" (1896), but his verses failed to assimilate their forerunners and remained transparently imitative. Lush, extravagant, and seemingly on the cusp of extinction, John's work offered an artistic analogue to the restrictive and annulling gene pools of the families of Usher and Des Esseintes, evidencing an inbreeding that produced ever more feeble issue until it died off in the quasi-parodic poems and prose poems of Aldous Huxley and early T. S. Eliot.

In reviewing Holbrook Jackson's critical history and Edmund John's sundry derivations, the *TLS* signaled the gulf between decadence and current literary fashion, showing how just as Des Esseintes is cowed by the portraits of his warrior ancestors, so decadence itself had been dwarfed by its aesthetic predecessors, Swinburne and Rossetti. Child reiterated his position when he reviewed Muddiman's *The Men of the Nineties* in 1920, claiming that when the 1890s finished, "they were over and done with," whereas the literary culture that had existed before the Great War remained "no less

vigorous and even more successful" after it.[35] The art of the nineties contained "seeds of death," he wrote, and could never grow and develop in the new century. Without suggesting that the *TLS* had an "official" position on decadence, it was clear that some of its contributors regarded it as a short-lived and thankfully bygone movement composed of what Malcolm Bradbury would later call "natural Parisians who could not quite summon up the cross-channel fare."[36] Decadence was unwholesome, foreign, and best kept at a safe distance.

Blowing a Rotted Flute: "Enoch Soames"

The writer and caricaturist Max Beerbohm had been at once central and marginal during what he termed the "Beardsley Period," and his view of its literature was very different from the dismissive certainties of Gribble and Child. His short story collection, *Seven Men* (1919), commenced with "Enoch Soames," a witty, highly sophisticated fantasy that began by reading of Jackson's "thorough" and "brilliantly written" book, one that brought to life "many writers, whom I had quite forgotten, or remembered but faintly."[37] Beerbohm's studied forgetfulness, like Yeats's, is but another of his many concealments, the story being at once a memorializing evocation of times passed and a meditation on the fickle nature of literary fame and posterity.

"Enoch Soames" begins in 1893, when, as Child said, the aesthetic mint had yet to abandon the gold standard, and when its author was himself shortly to be parodied by *Punch* as "Max Mereboom" or "the frumious Beerbohmax." That October, Max and his real-life friend, the artist William Rothenstein, are at the Café Royal when they see "a stooping, shambling person, rather tall, very pale, with longish and brownish hair."[38] He has "a chin on which a large number of hairs weakly curled and clustered to cover its retreat" and wears "a soft black hat of clerical kind but of Bohemian intention, and a grey, waterproof cape."[39] Rothenstein introduces him as "Edwin Soames," another early hint of how Beerbohm will juggle the subjectivity of memory and the nominally objective historical record in order to question any neat polarities between them.

Enoch Soames's name is not to be found in the index to Jackson's book, though an entire chapter is devoted to "The Incomparable Max," a fact that, like the study's dedication to him, Beerbohm's authorial persona is too modest to admit. Soames is the author of *Negations*, a title that recalls collections of the period such as Ella d'Arcy's *Monochromes* (1895) and Henry James's *Embarrassments* (1896), and what would seem his *meisterwerk*, *Fungoids.* Both

offer "traceries of old sounds / Blown from a rotted flute" and "have not worn well."[40] *Fungoids* sold only three copies, but the glimpses readers have of it suggest that its spores were broadcast more widely than might have been imagined. In "Nocturne," a title used by Edmund John and a number of other late Victorian poets, "Round and round the shutter'd Square / I strolled with the Devil's arm in mine" gives a diabolical twist to the "Choric Ode" from Tennyson's "Lotos-Eaters," even as it suggests Symons or the earlier poems of Eliot's from the "Inventions of the March Hare" notebook (1909–17).[41] Soames's raincoat and hat also implicate Symons, who took such sartorial precautions when loitering outside stage doors in inclement weather, but Soames is more than a mere poet: he is a spiritual dissident, a post-Baudelairean "Catholic Diabolist."[42] "Diabolism seemed to be a cheerful, even a wholesome, influence on his life," says Max,[43] harking back to those evenings when he heard Yeats hold forth about "Dyahbolism" and his friend Beardsley would sigh, "How awfully sweet." Soames exemplifies Bradbury's jibe about "natural Parisians," and with a name that fuses Arnold Bennett's given forename—he first appeared in the *Yellow Book* as "Enoch Arnold Bennett"—and a key member of Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga, he is destined to be displaced by those writers in the new century. The hapless poetaster makes a deal with the Devil to see whether, in a hundred years' time, he will be remembered, but, having surrendered his immortal soul, he is disappointed that he endures only in Beerbohm's fiction. His own work has been entirely forgotten.

What sort of a story is "Enoch Soames"? Is it a playful response to the cultural history offered by Holbrook Jackson, a proto-postmodern joke, or even a memoir, a story that is more about Max and the 1890s than the ludicrous poet who forms its ostensible subject? In his *TLS* review of Osbert Burdett's *The Beardsley Period* in February 1925, John Middleton Murry worried that Burdett was himself Soames, his prose being notable for its "floridescence."[44] The 1950 Penguin reissue of *Seven Men* "succeeds," said its blurb, "in demolishing a whole decade." But would Beerbohm really wish to erase his own past, let alone deploy the wrecking ball rather than his favored scalpel? Did he simply observe the cultural tremors of the 1890s, or was he somehow complicit in causing them? If Edmund John is emblematic of "Georgian decadence," where does that leave an arch and guarded writer whose persona is so evasive that even Wilde wondered whether he ever took off his face and revealed his mask? Child noted something of this ambivalent positioning in 1920, when, in his review of *The Men of the Nineties*,

he called Beerbohm "at once Pierrot and Pierrot's mirror."[45] Lawrence Danson also signals this elusiveness, noting how Beerbohm is "indelibly associated with the *Yellow Book* and the 1890s" and pursued "a career of relentless retrospection," yet in his "best work" is "very much of this century," even "related to the movement called modernism."[46] More recent criticism is less likely to treat association with canonical modernists as conferring artistic legitimacy, though it continues to emphasize Beerbohm's protean character. His "post-Victorian Decadent camp nostalgia," says Kristin Mahoney, is at once "knowing," "wistful," and "detached," "double-voiced in its use of the past."[47]

When the *TLS* reviewed *Seven Men*, in November 1919, its critic was greatly impressed by its grace and poise, comparing Beerbohm to "some cuttlefish dispersing silver and crepuscular fluid instead of a dense and a dark" and praising "his perfect little disk of fantasy, wit and satire."[48] Yet, the critic felt, it was too little, too perfect: Beerbohm's ambition had deserted him, and he was content to dwell languidly on a tiny worked plot of his own preparation. "It is not the doing it that [the critic] objects to," the review concluded; "it is the going on doing it." Beerbohm may have been very aware of his elective status as a fly in amber, but that did not prevent his being preserved therein.

The writer of that review was Virginia Woolf. What might be seen as the "modernist" elements of *Seven Men* went unrealized on its initial publication, partly because of Beerbohm's elegantly fashioned pose as a relic of an earlier age, and partly because of the book's genial irony, its knowing consideration of historical distance and changes of fashion and taste. Its links to decadence were, if acknowledged at all, uncontroversial, for it seemed axiomatic that Beerbohm would ridicule bygone affectations rather than attempting anything more ambitious. Portraying himself as marooned in a world he no longer understood, and advertising the experimental elements of neither his writing nor his cartoons, Beerbohm was regarded primarily as a humorist, a status that prevented him from being taken too seriously. In April 1894, his critics failed to detect the ironies of "A Defence of Cosmetics," so determined were they to attack the *Yellow Book* as a manifestation of demoralizing (if silly) perversity, but by the early twentieth century he was increasingly respected as the *Saturday Review*'s theater critic (1898–1910), a caricaturist, and a parodist. He was deeply indebted to the 1890s, but, it seemed, only in their being fodder for his art. His mockery of Enoch Soames disguised how the satire of certain decadent subject matter did not preclude

the type of technical experiment the movement elsewhere encouraged in its fastidious concern with narrative voice and form. Unlike his initial critics, Beerbohm understood that decadence was not monolithic, and his experimentation is both surface glitter and more profound, a meshing of history and fiction quite distinct from much of the writing earning the name "modernist" during the 1910s and 1920s. Inhabiting past, present, and future simultaneously, Beerbohm's work looks ahead to the temporal paradoxes of Jorge Luis Borges.[49]

Putting the Cat Out: "Tobermory"

Wilde's humor had amused some, but coming from an Irish nationalist of criminal sexual habits and anarchist sympathies, it had enraged others. As Carson's cross-examination of him showed, a determinedly humorless moralist could always find "ugly meanings in beautiful things." For such men, jokes that chipped away at institutions such as marriage, exalted the young above the old and respectable, or advocated pleasure before responsibility signaled reckless subversion, not harmless fun. But if Wilde's particular brand of decadent comedy was so tainted, how might one explain the popularity of Hector Hugh Munro, whose short stories have rarely been out of print since his debut collection, *Reginald*, appeared in 1904?

Born in 1870, Munro was a year or two younger than either Beerbohm or Beardsley, but he did not surface until 1900, adopting the pen name "Saki" from Edward Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam. He began his career as a historian and political satirist but soon became known for his cruelly witty fables populated by irresponsible young dandies such as Reginald, Clovis Sangrail, Comus Bassington, and Bertie van Tahn, "who was so depraved at seventeen that he had long ago given up trying to be any worse."[50] Saki's stock-in-trade was the arch epigram, and many of these beautifully poised asides might easily take their place among Wilde's "Phrases and Philosophies," as when Clovis announces that "a little inaccuracy sometimes saves tons of explanations."[51] Even his use of a nom de plume connects him to the pseudonymous decadents of the previous decade, such as "The Yellow Dwarf" (Henry Harland), "Fiona Macleod" (William Sharp), "Silhouette" (Symons), and "Logroller" (Richard Le Gallienne), who concealed their given names when writing for newspapers and magazines.

Saki's most successful collections—*The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911) and his response to Shaw's *Man and Superman*, *Beasts and Super-Beasts* (1914)—established him in the pantheon of modern humorists, but reading his work

today, one may be surprised by how it became so acceptable in his lifetime. Edmund John advertised his fondness for Swinburne, Wilde, and Beardsley and was pilloried for it. Saki, by contrast, was a Wildean in constant demand, the *Westminster Gazette* often printing his stories within a week of receiving them. The conversation between Van Cheele and a naked youth of sixteen that takes place in the knowingly titled "Gabriel-Ernest" (1910) would be unthinkable in most Georgian (or late Victorian) contexts, not least in a conservative newspaper that denounced Machen's *The Great God Pan* as "an incoherent nightmare of sex" and refused even to report the Wilde trials. Wilde feasted with panthers, but Saki's suavely spoken Gabriel is a very different beast. As A. J. Langguth remarks, the story rejected the "ill-bred" for the "unbred" and "stained and baggy trousers" for exquisite nudity, for Gabriel-Ernest is not a naked youth at all, but a werewolf, and his nakedness is an inevitable consequence of his lycanthropy.[52] Somehow mixing horror with comedy and eroticism, Saki is able to inscribe and erase the provocative vision of the boy "lying asprawl . . . drying his wet brown limbs in the sun."[53] "I can't have you staying in these woods," declares Van Cheele, only to receive the innuendo-laden reply, "I fancy you'd rather have me here than in your house." "The prospect of this wild, nude animal in Van Cheele's primly ordered house was certainly an alarming one," the narrator remarks, with masterly understatement.[54]

In 1911, Saki moved from Methuen to The Bodley Head, which printed his stories in elegantly bound hardbacks not unlike those that had carried names such as Machen, Shiel, and Corvo on their spines a decade or so previously. *The Chronicles of Clovis* offered a smorgasbord of decadent tropes, with reborn pagan gods, financial irresponsibility, dandyism, misogyny, and persistent ridicule of marriage, the Anglican Church, and the English aristocracy, not to mention ambient homoeroticism and epigrams aplenty. The book was not widely reviewed (the *TLS* ignored it), though whether this was because Saki had yet to join F. Anstey and W. W. Jacobs in the first rank of popular English comedy or because his brand of it was a taste the public at large had yet to acquire is uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the stories provoked no moral outcry. Munro was not a celebrity in the Wildean sense, and he was never so rash as to put his genius into his life. Lacking a biographical background (let alone a scandalous one combining sexual transgression and Irish nationalism) and associated with conservative newspapers, the stories were treated as amusing if slight, and their undercurrents ignored.[55] One could even suggest that they offered a means by which cer-

tain aspects of decadent writing passed into wider society. However, this transmission may also have been possible because the cultural context of a story like "Gabriel-Ernest" made readers unable to see, or admit to seeing, what was before their eyes. Wilde could be pitied for his supposed illness and tragic fate, or he could be quoted, but his vision could not be endorsed. If there is no such thing as a werewolf, then maybe Van Cheele's encounter with the boy is no more than an amusing absurdity, entirely lacking in sexual elements.

"Tobermory" (1911), the story of a talking cat, offers dandyism at its most feline, with the eponymous "super-beast" slinking through a country house party and picking up all manner of incriminating tidbits. Tobermory moves with "velvet tread and studied unconcern,"[56] his assurance and disdain all too palpable. "Boring questions lay outside his scheme of life,"[57] and to add piquancy to existence, he has no qualms about sharing what he has overheard. Wilde and Bosie had been blackmailed for their sexual indiscretions, but in this story, it is the twilight world of the heterosexual that is threatened with exposure. Tobermory reacts with disdain to the Major's ill-advised sally concerning his "carryings-on with the tortoiseshell-puss up at the stables,"[58] refusing to confirm or deny such a dalliance and immediately turning his gaze upon the Major's own "little affairs." Clovis, who plans to pay Tobermory hush money with a box of fancy mice from the *Exchange and Mart*, comments that he will probably take his gleanings to the newspapers. As bedroom spy, gossip columnist, and inscrutable, Baudelairean critic of human folly—Tobermory is surely a black cat—the dandy is a terrible threat to social conformity and has to be silenced. As Reading Gaol lacks accommodation for felines, poisoned food is prepared, for the dandy must be made a victim of his luxurious appetites. Before this can happen, though, the cat falls in unequal combat with a large yellow tom from the Rectory. Nature has taken its course, with an ironic suggestion of a divine intervention at the violation of the natural order that a so-called beyond-cat represents. This conclusion demonstrates the Darwinian worldview of many Saki stories but also underscores the risks taken by those who, well dressed, well spoken, witty, and socially adroit, refuse to accept the boundaries society decrees: silence, hypocrisy, self-denial, violence.

The Dropt Curtain and the Closing Gate

Decadence did not come to an end in 1895, for its very notion precludes and forbids such sudden and conclusive closure. As the *TLS* feared, it was

(and is) a viral phenomenon that adapts and mutates in order to resist the application of moral or stylistic penicillin. In the aftermath of Wilde's sentencing, however, nomenclature became elastic and evasive. Symons moved from "decadent" to "symbolist"; others preferred "new," "advanced," "radical," or the catchall "modern." Writers wishing to be welcomed by a growing legion of professional and academic critics were unwise to wear their decadent influences too well, as Ronald Firbank quickly discovered.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the radical and experimental stylistic elements of decadent writing were appropriated in ways that divorced them from their (im)moral context, making them first challengingly modernist and then respectable. Cultural power brokers such as Eliot slowly convinced a learned minority that literature of this kind represented a redoubtable bulwark against other forms of decadence, the growing populism and concomitant erosion of standards intellectuals had feared ever since the educational reforms of the 1870s. The Paterian moment shed its decadent skin and reemerged as the epiphany or the "moment of being." The techniques that had seemed to amount to little more than solipsistic audience baiting in Harland's "Tirala-tirala" (1895), a musical box's six-note tune prompting a melancholy rumination on the narrator's lost youth, now seemed at the epicenter of "modern" writing, interiority and the dramatization of selfhood replacing the exhausted mundanity of causal narrative.[59]

Elinor Glyn had sinned on her tiger skin as early as 1907. By the roaring twenties, decadence had become a term applied to a variety of self-indulgent, irresponsible, or merely pretentious behaviors: the cocaine binges dramatized by Aleister Crowley in *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (1922) and Noel Coward in *The Vortex* (1924), the Rabelaisian hedonism of Coleman and his fellow nightclubbers in Huxley's *Antic Hay* (1923), the Sitwells taking their gramophone onto the lawn in order to allow their peacocks to duet with the Savoy Orpheans. The transgressive qualities of 1890s decadence seemed almost reassuring when placed beside the final chapter of *Ulysses* (1922) or the confrontational D. H. Lawrence, and its productions became highly collectible, with bibliophiles and antiquarians transforming Beardsley, Corvo, Wilde, and members of the Rhymers' Club into cult figures. Memoirs and reminiscences from Le Gallienne, Machen, Symons, Yeats, Edgar Jepson, Ernest Rhys, Ada Leverson, and others cemented, albeit unintentionally, the distancing strategies of conservative reviewers, fossilizing what Le Gallienne called the "Romantic 'Nineties" as an era of absinthe and hansom cabs, perfumed with

patchouli and cigar smoke. There was, however, no cure for the "beautiful and interesting disease," or, it would seem, for scholarly interest in it.

Notes

1. *Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 1895, 6.

2. *Telegraph*, 6.

3. *Telegraph*, 6.

4. Ortolans are buntings, small birds eaten whole in a single mouthful. Ideally, the diner should cover their face with a white napkin while consuming them. For the consequences of Wilde's lifestyle, see Laurence Wrenne, "Oscar the Addict," *Wildean* 46 (Jan. 2015): 21-52; Laurence J. F. Wright, "Oscar the Addict? Part Two (i)," *Wildean* 48 (Jan. 2016): 2-27; and Laurence Wrenne, "Oscar the Addict Part Two (ii)—The Champagne Years," *Wildean* 49 (July 2016): 19-38.

5. Anne Clark Amor, "Heading for Disaster: Oscar's Finances," *Wildean* 44 (Jan. 2014): 37-56; John Gawsworth, *The Life of Arthur Machen*, ed. Roger Dobson (Leyburn: Tartarus, 2005), 129.

6. Oscar Wilde, "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young," *Chameleon*, Dec. 1894, 1-4.

7. H. Montgomery Hyde, ed., *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (London: William Hodge, 1948), 335.

8. "All art is quite useless" is the final maxim of the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

9. "Ambition is the last refuge of the failure." Wilde, "Phrases and Philosophies."

10. Merlin Holland, *Irish Peacock and Scarlet Marquess: The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (London: 4th Estate, 2003), 75. The remark apparently caused laughter in the courtroom.

11. "In examinations, the foolish ask questions that the wise cannot answer." Wilde, "Phrases and Philosophies."

12. Plato, *Dialogues*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Wiley, 1899), 36.

13. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Ward, Lock, 1891), 212.

14. Max Beerbohm, *Zuleika Dobson; or, An Oxford Love Story* (London: Penguin, 1988), 166.

15. W. B. Yeats, *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1936* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1936), xi.

16. [E. V. Lucas], "The Poems of Ernest Dowson," *TLS*, 2 June 1905, 177.

17. [Francis Gribble], "The Yellow 'Nineties," *TLS*, 4 Dec. 1913, 587. Gribble (1862-1946) was a historian and biographer with a particular interest in nineteenth-century France. An alpine sports enthusiast, he wrote several books on mountaineering.

18. [Gribble], "Yellow 'Nineties."

19. Alfred Lord Tennyson, "To the Queen" (1873), in *The Works of Alfred Lord*

Tennyson, Poet Laureate (London: Macmillan, 1898), 466; Arthur Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 87 (Nov. 1893): 859. Wilde told a correspondent, "There is an unknown land full of strange flowers and subtle perfumes, a land of which it is joy of all joys to dream, a land where all things are perfect and poisonous." Oscar Wilde, *Complete Letters*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: 4th Estate, 2000), 277. He used the pairing on many other occasions.

20. [Gribble], "Yellow 'Nineties."

21. The *TLS* was initially exactly that: a supplement to the *Times* newspaper. It was not published separately until 1914. Derwent May observes that its early years were dominated by writers who were "mainly Christian and classically-trained"; *Critical Times: The History of the Times Literary Supplement* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 69. The paper's 6000th issue (30 Mar. 2018) included a facsimile reprint of its first one.

22. Symons wrote only one piece for the *TLS*, "Joseph Conrad," a brief consideration of the novelist printed in the aftermath of Conrad's death (14 Aug. 1924, 493–94).

23. [Orlando Cyprian Williams], "The Aesthetic Fallacy," review of *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands*, by Arthur Symons, *TLS*, 3 Oct. 1918, 465. Williams (1883–1967) was Clerk of the House of Commons, a frequent *TLS* reviewer, and author of *Contemporary Criticism* (1924).

24. Linda Dowling, *Aestheticism and Decadence: A Selected Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1977), ix.

25. The *TLS* finally noticed Machen's novel half a century later, when it received generous consideration from Julian Symons (2 Apr. 1954).

26. [Harold Hannyngton Child], "Two Volumes of Verse," *TLS*, 28 Aug. 1913, 352.

27. Timothy d'Arch Smith notes that the "typography and binding" of John's collection are replicas of John Lane's productions of Phillips titles, for instance, *New Poems* (1908). "Edmund John," in *AKLO*, ed. Mark Valentine, Roger Dobson, and R. B. Russell (Oxford: Caermaen Books, 1998), 25.

28. Douglas later became editor of the *Sunday Express.* He led the outcry against Radcliffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928. Objecting to "two necrophilian stanzas . . . which utterly transgress the utmost limits of the permissible in English verse," Douglas ensured that John's book appeared in revised form minus the offending lines. This had the unintended consequence of increasing its sales: it was reprinted in 1914. James Douglas, "The Flute of Sardonyx," *Star*, 16 May 1913, 3.

29. Stephen Phillips, introduction to *The Flute of Sardonyx*, by Edmund John (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1913), 11.

30. Rudyard Kipling, "The 'Mary Gloster,'" in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948), 132.

31. Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,

1970); Smith, "Edmund John"; Michael Matthew Kaylor, ed., *Lad's Love: An Anthology of Uranian Poetry and Prose* (Kansas City: Valancourt, 2010).

32. Phillips, "Introduction," 9.

33. Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 187. This refers to the ominous "yellow book" that hastens Dorian's corruption.

34. Martin Seymour-Smith comments that Flecker was "noted for his fin de siècle style" and the "promising preciousness of his poetry," adding that his verse play *Hassan* (1922) is "agreeably luxuriant in its faintly decadent manner." "James Elroy Flecker," in *The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry*, ed. Jeremy Noel-Tod (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 190–91.

35. [Harold Hannyngton Child], "The Pierrots of the Nineties," review of *The Men of the Nineties*, by Bernard Muddiman, *TLS*, 15 July 1920, 452.

36. Malcolm Bradbury, "London 1890–1922," in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1976), 174. For a useful overview of tensions between the decadent and the modern in this period, see Kirsten MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), esp. 138–48.

37. Max Beerbohm, *Seven Men* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2000), 3.

38. Beerbohm, *Seven Men*, 6. Beerbohm and Rothenstein first met in 1893.

39. Beerbohm, *Seven Men*, 6.

40. Beerbohm, *Seven Men*, 15. The line suggests at once John and his inspiration, Swinburne, described by Tennyson as "a reed through which all things blow music."

41. Beerbohm, *Seven Men*, 16.

42. Beerbohm, *Seven Men*, 28.

43. Beerbohm, *Seven Men*, 16.

44. [John Middleton Murry], "The Beardsley Period," *TLS*, 19 Feb. 1925, 116.

45. [Child], "Pierrots of the Nineties," 452.

46. Lawrence Danson, *Max Beerbohm and the Art of Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 3.

47. Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), 29.

48. [Virginia Woolf], "The Limits of Perfection," review of *Seven Men*, by Max Beerbohm, *TLS*, 6 Nov. 1919, 627. The relationship between Woolf and Beerbohm is considered further in Danson, *Max Beerbohm*, 25–26; and Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence*, 46–49.

49. Borges's friend, Alberto Manguel, included "Enoch Soames" in his anthology of fantastic fiction, *Black Water* (1983).

50. Saki, "Tobermory," in *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911), in *The Complete Saki* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1967), 112. This description is strongly reminiscent of Cecil, the teenage aesthete in Ada Leverson's "Suggestion" (*Yellow Book* 5, Apr. 1895).

Saki's dandies were verbally interchangeable—the dialogue given to Clovis in the 1911 version of "Tobermory" was Bertie's in its 1909 incarnation in the *Westminster Gazette.*

51. Saki, *The Square Egg* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head, 1924), 160. This aside appears in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations.*

52. A. J. Langguth, *Saki: A Life of Hector Hugh Munro* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), 160.

53. Saki, *Complete Saki*, 64.

54. Saki, *Complete Saki*, 65.

55. His sisters destroyed his correspondence following his death in 1916, making many details of his personal life impossible to recover.

56. Saki, *Complete Saki*, 110.

57. Saki, *Complete Saki*, 111.

58. Saki, *Complete Saki*, 111.

59. Henry Harland, "Tirala-tirala," *Yellow Book* 6 (July 1895): 65–76. Forty years later, Justin O'Brien noted his anticipation of Proustian strategies in "Henry Harland, An American Forerunner of Proust," *Modern Language Notes* 54, no. 6 (June 1939): 420–28.

4 "A Poetess of No Mean Order"

Margaret Sackville, Women's Poetry, and the Legacy of Aestheticism

Joseph Bristow

> And now let us regard wistfully for a moment the *Literary Post*'s poet of the future. It is notable at the outset that the person who introduces or presents to our kind notice this poet of the future is none other than Lady Margaret Sackville, who, we believe, was the first president of the Poetry Recital Society. Her ladyship is a young woman of some parts, and she has managed wittingly or unwittingly to attract to herself a great deal more notice than those parts warrant. It is not astonishing that she should have impressed the *Literary Post*.
>
> Anonymous, "The Poet of the Future," *Academy*, 30 Apr. 1910, 416

"Her Ladyship": Margaret Sackville and the Public Woman Poet

Students of early twentieth-century British poetry have expressed only modest amounts of interest in Margaret Sackville (1881–1963), the gifted and prolific writer whose long and successful career began with an illustrated chapbook, *Floral Symphony*, in 1900 and concluded with her eighteenth collection, *Quatrains and Other Poems*, some sixty years later. Some of the poetry that she produced in her twenties and thirties bears most evidently the legacy of "Michael Field"—the professional identity adopted by the coauthors Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, several of whose shorter and longer poems, as well as closet dramas, approach classical subject matter in a sexually adventurous mode, if also in an antiquated idiom. If, for example, we

turn to Sackville's "Hymn to Dionysus" (1905), one immediately hears the enthusiasm for the Greek god whose vitalism Bradley and Cooper styled "the sap of the tree of life, the spring and origin of all good fruit" in their earliest drama, *Callirrhoë* (1884).[1] Just as clear in Sackville's poem is the presence of the aesthetic critic Walter Pater, whose resonant phrase for Dionysus—"the spiritual form of fire and dew"—is slightly modified in Sackville's subtitle ("*spirit of fire and dew!*").[2] And once we see how Michael Field learned much from Pater's brilliant 1876 essay on the god who exerts the power both to induce revelry and replenish the earth, Sackville emerges as an immediate heir to these late Victorian aesthetes. Pater, who observes in "the religion of Dionysus one of those many primitive modes of tree-worship," joins with Bradley and Cooper in shaping Sackville's powerful rendition of the joys and horrors that the nymphs worshipping Dionysus experience, as they speak in unison, yearning to witness the "hidden and obscured divinity":

> ours too is the desire
> Of earth, we know her passion unconfessed,
> We are bitten with life, we speak the language of earth,
> Mighty importunate,
> Of budding fields where the seeds wax great,
> The throbbing vivid sap in branch and root,
> And burning through all nature half perceived
> Spring's youngling heart wise and irresolute;
> And on our lips has breathed
> The inspiration of awakening days,
> Pæans and stormy prayers and praise
> And all our blood is leaping with the sod
> To meet the unseen god.[3]

This substantial passage warrants quoting at such length because it demonstrates Sackville's adroit rhetorical and rhythmic suppleness. The syntax, which unfolds across lines that expand and contract with great flexibility, pulsates with the "budding," "throbbing," "burning," and "leaping" energies animating the nymphs who are tending Dionysus's vine. It would not be unreasonable to say that the texture of the verse is "bitten with life," in much the same manner as we find in the nymphs' description of their desires.

Yet, as I maintain in this chapter, there are broader reasons for inquiring into Sackville's oeuvre than to demonstrate how she carefully affiliated her poems with previous generations of aesthetes. No sooner had Sackville en-

tered her twenties than she quickly became one of the most esteemed, well-published, and publicly visible poets of her time. Moreover, she was an elegant, even glamorous, woman who established her reputation as an organizer and leader of several of the metropolitan societies—including ones linked with an emergent modernism—that sought to strengthen the cultural profile of poetry. Moreover, as I explain here, Sackville forged her not inconsiderable early career in the midst of debates that involved her in giving English poetry an audible voice through forums, including the Poetry Society, that supported elocution and the recitation of verse. Before the Great War, her extremely active immersion in groups such as the Poets' Club and the Poetry Recital Society brought her into contact with some of the writers who were linked, most clearly through Ezra Pound, to the *Imagistes*, whose poetics diverged markedly from her own. Even more challenging for Sackville's art was the military carnage that began once war was declared on 28 July 1914. In response, she had to weigh her pronounced antipathy to war against the type of aestheticism to which she had pledged herself as a young woman writer of enormous ambition.

At times, Sackville's investment in her role as an esteemed and highly visible woman poet, especially during a period when campaigns for female suffrage met with hostility, came at a price. During the first two decades of her busy professional life, it was unsurprising that several commentators agreed that she ranked "as a poetess of no mean order." Her poetry, however, was sometimes subjected to striking forms of male condescension that despised her status as a woman poet. On occasion, male reviewers believed that what they sensed were the apparent limitations of her poems could be attributed to her attractive, if not imposing, femininity. By 1912, when she issued her fifth collection, *Lyrics*, an anonymous critic in *Poetry and Drama* had no hesitation in belittling her writings on such grounds:

> Were there no living poets of the other sex, Lady Margaret Sackville's name would be of literary pre-eminence. But it must also be admitted that the spirit of true poetry would probably then be dead. The difference between these verses and the work of any of the foremost poets of the day is simply this, that the output of personality which has been an essential factor in the creating of the latter is here almost entirely lacking. This is no reflection on the personality of the author. It should be understood merely as a footnote to the history of sex and art.
>
> It seems that the creative faculty of woman is canalised, and art is not its channel.[4]

Even though it might at first seem reasonable to dismiss such bullish comments as barefaced chauvinism, it is significant that this reviewer takes Sackville as an appropriate example to explain why female poets remain second-rate by virtue of their sex. To this observer, no amount of learning or intelligence will ever compensate for this biological deficiency. "It is of no avail," he says, "for the ultra-feminist to murmur of the power of independence and of education."[5] In all likelihood, Sackville's literary achievements as an erudite author—one whose works reveal a high level of classical education—proved irksome because she was a much-observed individual who had written on the relations between women and poetry. More to the point, Sackville appeared before the public not just as an attractive woman, whose good looks were observed in the press, but also as a lady—and an aristocratic one at that.

Never once did Sackville apologize for her membership in the nobility. In most of her publications, she signed herself Lady Margaret Sackville, which is the form in which she had been known ever since she started attending high-society events during her childhood. Her decision to publish under her title, as we can see from the unsparing comments in the *Academy*, sometimes opened her up to mockery. "Her ladyship," as this unwelcoming reviewer intimates, sounds more than a little pretentious in a modern democratic world. As this critic saw it, her aristocratic title was likely to appeal to the likes of those who read the newfound *Literary Post*—a penny weekly that sought to adopt "a lighter and more popular tone" than the "older reviews."[6] Given that her name had arisen in court circulars since she was at least ten years old, many readers of the press would have known that Sackville had come out as a debutante during the season of 1900. Her mother, the Dowager Countess De La Warr (the widow of Reginald Sackville, 7th Earl De La Warr), a Catholic convert and scholar in her own right, presented the eighteen-year-old to Her Majesty, the Queen. To the *Daily Mail*, Sackville was picture perfect: "She has a charming little nose and mouth, large soft eyes, and lovely hair"; "she is," this report went on to mention, "very clever too, and has written many poems which have appeared in print."[7]

By all accounts, Sackville maintained a visually stunning presence, as we can see from two press photographs, both of which present her in the best couture of her time. In a close-up shot dating from 1915, she turns her upward gaze confidently to the camera in a wide-brimmed straw hat decorated with flowers, while her neck is covered with marabou. By comparison, in

the rather heavily treated press photograph that comes from 1924 she bears more than a passing resemblance to a modern flapper, with her hair styled above the neckline and a silken band encircling her brow. To be sure, she is not sporting a beaded dress, and her pearls are hardly on the long strings we associate with the Jazz Age of the 1920s. Still, the image captures the sophisticated tastefulness of her attire, while her gaze looks directly at the viewer. Arguably, the finest portrait of her—one that does more than present her as a striking society icon—is by George Henry, which is held at the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Henry's painting renders Sackville as a chic society woman in an aquamarine overdress, with understated earrings, a single-stone ring, and a small corsage pinned to the bodice. She sits with her chin propped firmly in her right hand, while she leans slightly forward, as if intently contemplating something of importance in the distance. At the same time, her left forearm sweeps open to one side, suggesting that she has no qualms about exposing her fine figure. Her somewhat tubular frame, together with the geometrical hairstyle, speaks to her modernity. As critics have observed, the contrast between the underdress and the luxurious silken garment that wraps around it places the artwork historically, since it represents an up-to-date look from 1910.[8] In every way, the striking image captures both Sackville's graceful demeanor and her intellectual seriousness, reminding us of the poised femininity that she had cultivated since her teens.

Sackville's assured self-presentation as a high-ranking woman, as the comments in both *Poetry and Drama* and the *Academy* indicate, made her at times prone to disdain. Yet Sackville was the first person to recognize how her ladylike manner prompted such responses. The canny foreword to her *Collected Poems*, a substantial 324-page volume that came out in 1939, is a case in point. Here she begins a series of wry reflections on a career spanning four decades by focusing not so much on her artistry as on the once-fashionable items crowding her closet:

> Like a vain lady, afflicted with a mania for hoarding discarded clothes, who examines her wardrobe on some unoccupied afternoon, curious to rediscover what still hangs stored there, so I, in regard to these poems. She stares bewildered, a little shocked—"Can it be possible," she exclaims, "this gown of ten years back? The frumpy-rag! *I* can't have worn it, *surely*. What *did* I look like!" She tries to slip it on. Alas! Gown and figure match no longer. And oh! the *cut*, the length, the *waist-line*. "And I was *admired*—unbelievably *admired*—in this ridiculous get up!"

(*left*) Press photograph of Margaret Sackville, ca. 1915. Claude Harris Ltd., 122 Regent Street, London. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. (*right*) Touched-up press photograph. Photographer unknown. Wide World Photos. Dated 14 May 1924.

> She makes further gruesome and grotesque discoveries. Ridiculous indeed, yet, in a sense, her biography.[9]

As Sackville reveals a little further on, there is probably some value in considering her poetry in relation to rapid changes in women's fashion: "Is it," she asks rhetorically, "too trivial a simile to apply to verse?"[10] The answer of course is no, and in her particular case, it is probably the most apposite comparison imaginable. Sackville had no doubt amassed a remarkable wardrobe, just as she had accumulated a very large body of different types of lyrical, dramatic, and war poetry. Yet her decision to exploit this ostensibly "trivial simile"—especially through her fastidiously performed upper-class emphases on almost every other word—points to the fact that she knew only too well that that she had for years presented herself gracefully before the public's critical gaze. Her comments also implicitly admit that her art is now somewhat superannuated.

The truth, as Sackville recognized, was that her onetime role as a fashion

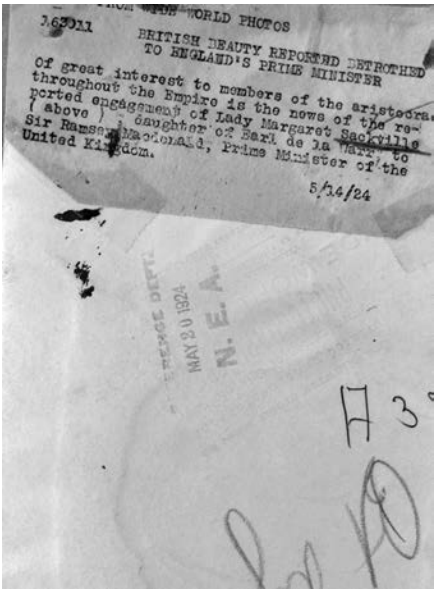
Portrait of Lady Margaret Sackville, ca. 1910 (oil on canvas), George F. Henry (1858-1943). Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK. © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums/Bridgeman Images.

icon was only a part—though an inescapably important part—of her biography. By 1939, when Europe stood on the brink of the Second World War, she had been settled for four years in Cheltenham Spa. Prior to moving to Gloucestershire in 1935, where she maintained her lifelong pattern of delivering lectures, arranging poetry recitals, and attending literary clubs, she had spent much of her time after the 1914-18 war living with her Scottish mother in Easter Duddingston, Midlothian. Sackville's numerous endeavors, which extended to other projects such as writing children's stories and plays, as well as performing in dramas and making wooden toys for charity, show that there was much more to her career than a large amount of outdated—though at one time fetching—poetry.

Yet the biographical record—especially for someone who had "managed wittingly or unwittingly to attract to herself a great deal more notice" than

seemed justified at the time—remains somewhat hard to construe. No matter how much she was in the public eye during her early adulthood, it was also the case that comparatively little was understood about her personal contacts outside her immediate friends and family. In April 1909, there was much excitement in the press when it learned of her engagement to Edmund Sellar, the youngest son of William Young Sellar, the well-regarded classics scholar who held the Chair in Humanity at Edinburgh University from 1863 until his death in 1890. Exactly why the couple decided not to go ahead with their wedding, especially at the moment when family members were gathering together for the event, is still not understood. This is also the case with the affair that Sackville conducted with the anti-imperialist poet and Arabian horse breeder Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, which began in 1899 when she was seventeen. In a substantial biography of Blunt that came out in 1938, Edith Finch described the encounter between the sixty-year-old owner of Crabbet House and his teenage lover in platonic terms. "Another new friendship," Finch observes, "which continued to the end of Blunt's life was with Margaret Sackville who visited him at Fernycroft."[11] Blunt, in the preface furnished for Sackville's *Selected Poems* (1919), asserted that she was "the best of our poetesses," and he praised "the classic tradition in form and dignity" that characterizes her poetry.[12] He also wrote many poems about her. Particularly inspiring for Blunt, it seems, was an unpublished sonnet of Sackville's about King Arthur, which begins, "Arthur still loves for those who love him well."[13] Bestirred by passion, Blunt replied in a sonnet, "Why wait for Arthur? He too long has slept."[14] The rapture that Sackville awoke in him prompted another sonnet: "What price, child, shall I pay for your bright eyes / (How large a debt!) the light they shed on me?"[15] Especially enchanting, he says, are Sackville's "maiden gestures free."[16] These lines take on a different cast, however, when we read Elizabeth Longford's version of these events, which appeared in 1979: "Not far away from Fernycroft lived Lady De La Warr and her highly poetical daughter Lady Margaret Sackville." "Margaret," Longford observes, with Blunt's correspondence to hand, "had already written love-sonnets which she wanted to publish, but which her mother feared might be 'misunderstood.' "[17] The affair, which appears to have been Sackville's first, continued for two months, until Blunt—for some reason—ended it.

Helen Carr, in her imposing study of the "verse revolutionaries" whose experimental poetry culminated in imagism, has broached the question of


WORLD PHOTOS
BRITISH BEAUTY REPORTED BETROTHED
TO ENGLAND'S PRIME MINISTER
Of great interest to members of the aristocra
throughout the Empire is the news of the re-
ported engagement of Lady Margaret Sackville
(above) daughter of Earl de La Warr to
Sir Ramsay Macdonald, Prime Minister of the
United Kingdom.
5/14/24
MAY 20 1924
N. E. A.

"British Beauty Reported Betrothed to England's Prime Minister." Pasted-in typewritten slip on back of press photograph of Margaret Sackville. Wide World Photos. Dated 14 May 1924.

Sackville's outward respectability that managed to mask the fact that the young poet "had affairs with no fewer than two figures who might be thought unlikely lovers for the daughter of an earl."[18] Blunt was one. The other was none other than the Labour statesman Ramsay MacDonald. It took, however, until 2006 before dozens of MacDonald's love letters to Sackville surfaced at the National Archives. The letters disclose that their secret affair, which began in 1913 and ended sixteen years afterward, involved the widowed MacDonald making several proposals of marriage, all of which she rebuffed. There is some evidence that the press had learned that an announcement of their engagement might break in 1924. But the timing involved difficulties, given that MacDonald was serving as prime minister during a precarious short-lived government that began in January and ended in November that year. Journalists have also suggested that the marked class differences between Sackville and MacDonald would probably have generated too many social and political tensions between them, had they chosen

to wed.[19] MacDonald was the illegitimate son of a Highland plowman and a female farm servant, was raised as a Scottish Presbyterian, and was a socialist who remained deeply critical of the ruling class.

Whatever speculations one makes about their discreet romance, there is, however, a significant point that emerges from Sackville's close involvement with MacDonald, and it is one that broadens our understanding of her poetry. The bond between them draws attention to the fact that Sackville counted among the small minority of titled individuals who supported the Labour Party. Her nephew, Herbrand Sackville, 9th Earl De La Warr, was the first hereditary peer to follow MacDonald; he became, at the young age of twenty-three, a Labour government minister. Moreover, Sackville, like MacDonald, was a committed pacifist. (This was a position that made MacDonald unpopular during the war.) Moreover, she pledged herself to internationalist campaigns for women's enfranchisement. Her political statements during World War I appeared in MacDonald's *Socialist Review* (the journal that the Independent Labour Party established in 1908), E. D. Morel's *U.D.C.* (the magazine of the Union of Democratic Control, the largest pacifist organization at the time), and Mary Sheepshanks's *Ius Suffragii* (the monthly that the International Woman Suffrage Alliance founded in 1906).

In the remainder of my discussion, I first consider the initiatives that she took in developing her profile as an increasingly politicized female writer who believed that women had yet to produce their greatest poetry. Secondly, my analysis shifts to her eagerness to ensure that the aesthetic power of verse could renew its cultural influence through sociable forums, public recitation, and disciplined training. Thereafter, I examine some of the conflicts that her ideal of the decorous poetic voice faced when she published poetry in the name of women who wished to secure peace.

"The Rising Art of Woman": Sackville, Femininity, and Poetic Decorum

Sackville was probably no more than nineteen years old when she submitted her first substantial essay, "Women and Poetry," to Ada S. Ballin's *Womanhood*—an extraordinary periodical that, as Kathryn Ledbetter has noted, "featured contributions from titled aristocrats as well as New Woman celebrity feminists" such as Sarah Grand (Frances Bellenden Clarke McFall).[20] Moreover, as Ledbetter shows, the version of the New Woman that one finds in Ballin's magazine is "well educated, clever, and easygoing. She is quick and confident in debate, comfortable in crowds of both sexes, assertive with

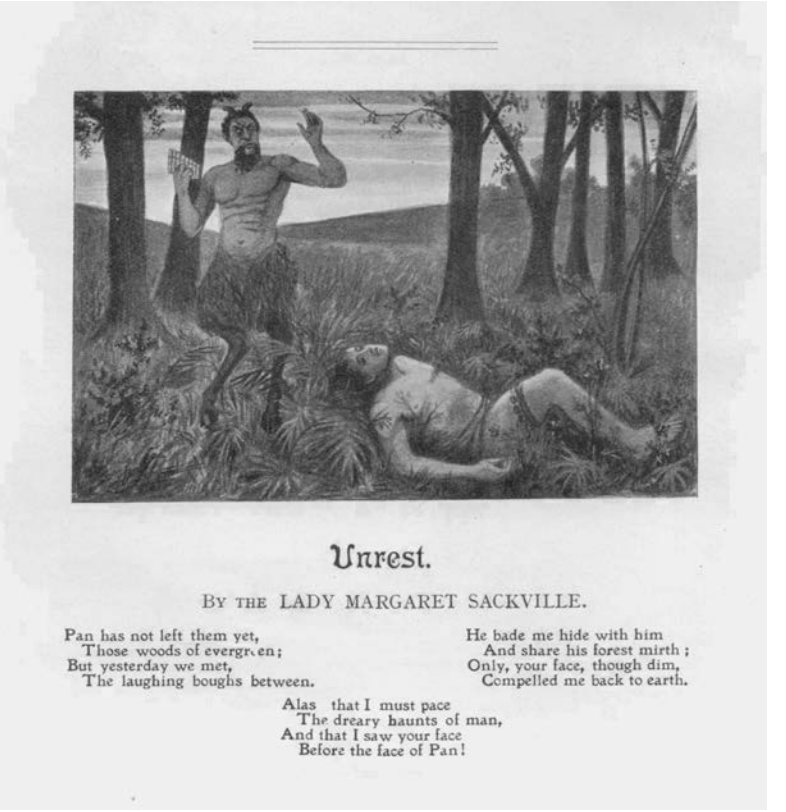
servants, and knowledgeable about medical subjects."[21] Yet, apart from these brief insights, not much has been written about Ballin's monthly, to which Sackville's mother also made several contributions. This is also true of the Women Writers' Dinner, which Sackville attended the same year as she came out as a debutante. In 1900, just over a decade after it began as the Ladies' Literary Dinner, Sackville joined 150 other women (including Lady Knightley, Lady Jephson, Lady Glover, and Lady Strachey) at the Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly Circus, to hear the established novelist and anti-suffragist Mary Augusta Ward give an address, where she spoke about "the year's literary work."[22] Ward commented on "the astonishing rise in the general standard of women's poetical work," acknowledging the achievements of such figures as Alice Meynell (a prominent Catholic aesthete), Margaret L. Woods (an author who moved in Ward's circles at Oxford), Rosamund Marriott Watson (a decadent contributor to the *Yellow Book*), and Emily Lawless (the Anglo-Irish writer known for her Unionist collection of poetry, *With the Wild Geese* [1902]).[23]

In "Women and Poetry," Sackville takes the initiative to explain why women have not excelled, until the nineteenth century, in the art of poetry. "Woman (speaking generally)," she writes, "has, till very recent years, been nourished, more or less unconsciously, on the idea of her own inferiority. Whether she is or is not inferior has yet to be proved."[24] Sackville shrewdly contends that the majority of women have found it difficult to triumph as leading poets because male authors have long given the impression that femininity is synonymous with the art form itself. "Woman," she observes, "has proved excellent material for poetry generally; she has been the charming peg in which to hang every imaginable intellectual and moral quality. From this has arisen the illusion that woman is herself poetical. She is not. Nor is there any possibility that she should be."[25] As she unravels her thoughts on this topic, Sackville asserts that it is perhaps no surprise that "in the childhood of woman's emancipation the influence of the age should be so adverse to the highest poetical achievement." The problem, as she sees it, relates to a serious misunderstanding of aestheticism. "'Art for Art's Sake,'" she claims, with specific reference to women, "has been construed into 'Art for Self's Sake.'" The result is a self-regarding poetry that reminds one of Narcissus, the gorgeous boy who "forgets Apollo is infinitely more beautiful than he, and infinitely more excellent to worship." In 1900, she contends, matters are made worse by the emergence of decadence—"a pleasure in dark and doubtful places, a cynicism which looks upon itself with a

sad, half-admiring pity"—that comes from "the babbling of little men." Particularly troubling, she says, is the inevitable fact that, since "art reflects the general spirit of an age," the current "Zeitgeist tends rather towards cheapness, hypocrisy, and noise." The time has arrived for "the rising art of woman" to aspire toward "the highest ideals, imitating as little as possible, but developing her own individuality to the utmost." The point, Sackville argues, is not to "revile men as monsters of tyranny" but instead to seek "high eminences." In the end, this woman poet of the future will "prove herself of powers unguessed at."[26] It is not too much to say that Sackville modeled her career on this ambition to realize a distinctly new women's poetry, though hers was an art whose debts—at least in relation to form and language—owed much to traditionalist writers associated with aestheticism.

If we look at two of the early poems that Sackville placed in *Womanhood*, we can grasp the challenges that she believed confronted her poetic authority. The first lyric, "Unrest," explores a woman's conflicted relationships with a mortal lover, on the one hand, and with the figure of Pan, on the other hand. Her three quatrains extend an established tradition of Victorian poems that focus on the Bacchic god as the originator of lyric: a highly sexual figure who plucks the reed Syrinx, violates her body with a quick incision, and through that wound pipes the sweetest sounds. This is the startling scenario that Elizabeth Barrett Browning explores in "A Musical Instrument," where the speaker recalls Pan's voice as he cuts the reed and extracts the pith: "This is the way / . . . / The only way, since gods began, / To make sweet music."[27] Sackville takes the woman's encounter with the god of lyric, however, in a different—because sensual—direction. Her poetic voice recalls how she and Pan "met, / The laughing boughs between." As the accompanying illustration makes plain, this shaggy goat-footed beast enshrines sexual excitement, as he stands erect, approaching—with panpipes in his hand—a somewhat androgynous girl reclining in the grass. "He bade me hide with him," she says, "And share his forest mirth." The problem for the female speaker, though, is that her longer history of heterosexual romance drags her poetic aspirations down to the ground: "your face," she says directly to her male lover, "though dim, / Compelled me back to earth." Faced with this indefinite image of a male who hardly resonates in her memory, the poetic voice has no option but "to pace / The dreary haunts of man." Had she seen "the face of Pan" before that of the man whom she may well have to marry, her world would have been not only passionate but also, as Pan's myth implies, poetical.[28]

The previous year in *Womanhood* Sackville had published another equally



Unrest.

BY THE LADY MARGARET SACKVILLE.

Pan has not left them yet,
Those woods of evergreen;
But yesterday we met,
The laughing boughs between.

He bade me hide with him
And share his forest mirth;
Only, your face, though dim,
Compelled me back to earth.

Alas that I must pace
The dreary haunts of man,
And that I saw your face
Before the face of Pan!

Lady Margaret Sackville, "Unrest," *Womanhood* 9 (1902-3): 4. Illustrator unknown.

pointed lyric, "Fallen," which amplifies her sense of the need to liberate women's passions in the name of producing powerful art. As the title implies, Sackville elaborates on the Victorian genre that concentrates on the woman whose sexual misdemeanors have resulted in her fall from grace. Such poems, by writers such as Amy Levy, Christina Rossetti, and Augusta Webster, frequently evoke compassion for the ingénue who has violated codes of respectability by acting rashly on her desires. In Levy's monologue "Magdalen," for example, the speaker—who is dying from venereal disease in a lock hospital for prostitutes taken off the streets—denounces the man who has infected her. Had someone warned her about the dangers to her health, she would have repudiated him: "Thereon I straight had turned

away— / Ay, tho' my heart had crack'd with pain— / And never kiss'd your lips again."[29]

Sackville, once again, advances on this tradition. In "Fallen," there is no sense that a woman should be sternly warned against the medical hazards involved in the desire for intimacy with a male lover. "The passion which comes with the glance of Love," Sackville's speaker recalls, "Was nought to my soul when her wings were fire." On this view, there is a form of desire that is spiritual, elevating, and beautiful—it reaches "the golden lights on the clouds above." As she experienced this higher passion, the wings of her soul "grew strong in their eagle flights." In every way, this was a far superior form of yearning. But the moment we hear her give voice to such rapture, a row of ellipses creates a break between the first and last two stanzas. Once we look below this row of dots, we learn what has happened to her after she succumbed to the "glance of Love." Like the speaker in "Unrest," she is compelled to remain on earth, on this occasion wandering the streets as an outcast. Worse still, she is stigmatized in public: "Branded the Slave of Love." In no respect does Sackville's poem condemn the woman who "wanders . . . with a ceaseless moan." To the contrary, "Fallen" acknowledges that carnal knowledge has ensured that "the earth is hers (for such is Love's will!) / And a human heart and a life of pain." Had she been able to remain forever "with the beautiful," she would have splendored in "the silent breast of the snow-clasped hill"—the utmost reaches of the sublime. Ultimately, it was the impossibility that her art might rise above her physical yearnings that has ensured that she is condemned to dwell among "Gloom and sin" for the rest of her days.[30]

In some respects, these lyrics from *Womanhood* might appear a mite puritanical, in the sense that they show that mortal love and the sensual body lead women into hopeless cycles of betrayal, ones that thwart their ability to attain higher ideals. But this view needs to be balanced against Sackville's repeated insight that women have yet to realize what it might mean to create great art. She repeats this view in the introduction to *A Book of Verse by Living Women*, where she remains hesitant about the cultural assumptions that suggest that "poetry is one of the few arts which popular prejudice has permitted women to exercise without opposition."[31] In skeptical tones, Sackville draws into question the pervasive belief that the "writing of verse appears to demand certain gifts which are superficially held to be peculiar to women."[32] Even though she grants that Barrett Browning "had genius," she expresses no illusions about the scarcity of women writers who have

achieved as much: "It remains to be seen how far women have justified this belief that they have the necessary qualifications for writing poetry."[33] Even more emphatically, she observes of women that "they may have been poems, but they have rarely written them."[34] As Sackville knows, her statement is empirically untrue: literary history reveals that women have written numerous great poems over the centuries. Her polemic, however, is aimed at dismissing the type of poetry that comes from "a pretty, spoilt woman, who desires to display her emotions before an admiring audience."[35] (Sackville targets the Romanian-French writer Anna de Noailles for such lapses.) Instead, Sackville wants to behold "the angel of the modern poet."[36] For her perspective, the inspiring "angel" will put women's poetry at a distance from the "glass reflecting nothing but themselves," an attitude that Sackville believes "give[s] expression to dishevelled emotion."[37] That she draws on a metaphor that concentrates on presenting one's femininity properly in public (she has no patience with the decadent touches of "rouged cheeks and darkened eyes") speaks to Sackville's larger project of ensuring that women artists present themselves with decorum, not artifice, before their audiences.[38]

Sackville identifies two poets who prove exemplary in this regard. She finds in Alice Meynell an "art so disciplined, so obedient, that whatever it expresses can be said in that way and no other."[39] Particularly appealing is the timbre of Meynell's poetry: "Speaking in a low clear voice it is heard across the clamour of the world."[40] Not surprisingly, Sackville includes Meynell's "Renouncement," which strives to deflect any indulgence in emotional outpouring, even though the speaker recognizes the temptation to luxuriate in yearning for the beloved: "I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong, / I shun the thought that lurks in all delight."[41] Sackville praises, too, "the full-blooded, opulent verse of Michael Field."[42] "Michael Field's," she continues, "is one of the strongest women's voices of the present day."[43] Especially attractive, it appears, is the manner in which Michael Field acknowledges their "evident forbears" among the Elizabethans, while remaining "of to-day in spirit and expression."[44] Here, in her selections, Sackville ensures that Michael Field is represented through poems that recognize how fine lyric poetry works more with ideas about passion than the emotion itself. In one of Bradley and Cooper's most accomplished lyrics, for example, they enlarge on the long-acknowledged paradox that the deepest yearning arises only when the beloved is absent: "Love only comes to me when thou art gone: / Then he draws to me in his might, / Sundering with his infinite / Power."[45]

It is an indication of how unidealistic Sackville remains about the state of contemporary women's poetry that she finds space to comment on only two of the writers whose "more recent productions" she has selected for the anthology.[46] She reserves great praise for Anna Bunston, the Christian poet who—like Sackville—placed her work in a broad array of magazines prior to World War I. If Sackville found a disciplined severity in Meynell's verse, it would be difficult to unearth a more austere lyric than "The Dead Praise Not Thee, O God":

> We are alone: the dead who sleeping lie,
> And I who mow the grass above their head.
> Since I still move, I say: "The dead—and I,"
> But had I thought of what it is to die,
> And what to live, I might have simply said,
> "We dead."[47]

To be sure, Bunston wants to recall that the afterlife in heaven rises far above anything we might experience in this mortal coil. But the moral, even if we can extract some dry humor from it, remains grim. By comparison, the kudos that Sackville gives to Rosalind Travers, the follower (and later spouse) of the socialist leader Henry Hyndman, is also somewhat surprising. One wonders what value, apart from the political purpose in writing about homelessness, Sackville found in Travers's "The Tramp": "I have turned my face away from the City, / . . . men turn their eyes away / From me, who have no friend but Earth. / Mother, mother, let me in!"[48] Once we encounter such inept lines, it is difficult not to hear some unintentional irony in Sackville's firm conclusion to her introduction: "So there is little, but satisfaction, to be gained from the contemplation of women's verse." "The supreme woman," she adds, "who shall sum up all the rest in one enduring song has not yet, perhaps will never, come."[49] This is without doubt a dispiriting note to strike in a volume devoted to showcasing recent poetry by living women.

There are, however, exceptions to these disappointing choices. A case in point is Frances Cornford's triolet "To a Fat Lady Seen from a Train," which repeats a heartrending question with insistent bluntness: "O why do you walk through the fields in gloves, / Missing so much and so much?"[50] Each time we come across Cornford's inquiry, one thinks twice about the uneasiness that motivates this interrogative poem. What is going on the world when one is impelled to assume that the "fat white woman" looks ridiculous as she tries to maintain her dignity in the open air? And why is it that even

a female passenger on a train should take note of the fat woman's apparent absurdity, in which she is supposedly "missing" out on life? What, the poem implies, has happened to attitudes toward femininity in the early twentieth century? One part of Sackville's recognition of certain shifts in women's relations with poetry relates in part to the type of social connection that the bystander in Cornford's poem wants to make, as she observes the fat woman who occupies a world in which certain female bodies are subject to the cruelest censure. How might poetry, Sackville wanted to know, become a socially decorous art form, especially for women? Answering this question became ever more urgent as she developed her skills as a public woman in giving poetry a stronger and more organized voice. Her initial efforts were through the Poets' Club, though this was a group whose shortcomings soon became evident to several observers.

"The Poets' Club Is Death": Sackville, Sociability, and the Decorum of Recitation

Ever since announcements began to circulate about the establishment of the Poets' Club in April 1908, the very idea of "bringing bards and songsters together . . . to read and recite to each other their inspired lines" humored members of the press. Throughout this derisive feature in the *Tatler* (a magazine dedicated to fashionable society), Spencer Leigh Hughes milked the apparent absurdity of the proposed gathering for all he could. If, Hughes contends, it is a "well-established precedent that a poet's eye should roll in a fine frenzy," it is likely that the eyes of "the poets reading their productions to each other . . . will be rolling all the time." "It strikes me," he mockingly notes, "that the Poets' Club might very well form itself into a sort of trade union demanding a living wage and seeing that no one undercuts the market."[51] Yet in spite of such silliness, Hughes makes it clear that poets in 1908 appear both affected and eccentric—to the extent that their poetry is likely to induce nothing less than a mind-boggling madness. By comparison, the much more informed *Academy*—whose bile probably came from the truculent subeditor T. W. H. Crosland—addressed the apparent preposterousness of the venture for rather different reasons. "It goes without saying," its reviewer sarcastically pronounced, "that the bare idea of a Poets' Club arouses in us abounding interest." Regrettably, though, it is an idea that has turned out to be discouraging in practice. On hearing an "account of the first dinner and meeting of the new session" of the club, which took place in October that year, the *Academy* was startled to find that the assembled group consti-

tuted a bunch of literary nobodies. After going through a list of mostly unheard-of names (including a "Mr. H.A. Cruso [not Robinson]"), the *Academy* concluded that there was only one that belonged to "a single poet, Lady Margaret Sackville to wit." Of the rest, "we are unable to find any record." Moreover, as far as the invited speaker Selwyn Image was concerned, the *Academy* discovered that he was the author of an obscure volume titled *Carols and Poems* (1894). "We have no doubt whatever," this critic carps, that Image's "address on 'Nature and Imagination' would be a striking affair, and calculated to edify an assemblage of poets."[52]

These irreverent commentaries show that the Poets' Club seemed populated either by unknown entities or by members of a faded generation. Selwyn Image counted among the latter cohort. A radical Anglican who made several innovative contributions to book design in the 1880s and 1890s, he was closely linked with the ambitious *Century Guild Hobby Horse* (1884–94), a remarkable journal—one that might be regarded as avant-garde for its time—in which Image pledged his faith in dissolving divisions between the arts ("Credo in unam Artem, multipartem, indivisibilem" [I believe in one art, manifold, indivisible]).[53] His lecture "The Unity of the Arts," which he delivered at Willis's Rooms in December 1887, had a considerable impact on Oscar Wilde's understanding of the anti-mimetic condition of art. "Art," as Wilde notes in his review of Image's talk, "must not content itself simply with holding up a mirror to nature, for it is a re-creation more than a reflection, and not a repetition, but rather a new song."[54] The fact that in December 1908 the club honored Wilde's literary executor, Robert Ross, with a dinner celebrating the fourteen-volume edition of Wilde's *Collected Works* gives a fair indication of the milieu that enjoyed these events. As we can tell from the three subsequent anthologies of members' verse that appeared from 1909 through 1913, a substantial number of the participants in the monthly dinners—which met in various venues, including the United Arts Club, St James's Place, the Hotel Richelieu, Oxford Street, and the Café Monico, Shaftesbury Avenue—had known each other from earlier organizations, such as the all-male Rhymers' Club, which Image attended in the 1890s.

By January 1909, the Poets' Club issued its initial publication, *For Christmas MDCCCCVIII*, a short unpaginated pamphlet in which the title page lists the contents as "New Poems" by Selwyn Image, Lady Margaret Sackville, Henry Simpson, Marion Cran, F. W. Tancred, T. E. Hulme, and Dermot Freyer. The contents are very mixed. Image's uninspiring "Christmas and New Year's Greetings" opens the concise volume: "Grey old Year," he begins, "crouched

low and shivering, / 'Mid the last leaves spent and quivering."[55] "Again the Old Year ends!" he reprises, many lines later. Sackville's contributions include "Ballade of the Journey's End," a salute—at least in form—to the 1880s vogue for reviving antiquated poetic genres, including such models as the triolet. Her lyric, "The Princess' Song," hearkens back to the ballads of sexual betrayal familiar to readers of William Morris's and Christina Rossetti's early poetry ("I would I had a lover who would come to me"). Once we turn, though, to Sackville's "Ode to Aphrodite," the poetry begins to appear less like an exercise acknowledging bygone verse and more as a respectful innovation upon Sappho's famous lyric. Here, even if the diction is generations old, Sackville's writing is at its most poised and evocative. The disciplined measures of her fluent lines reveal that the poet's reverence for the goddess of love exerts aesthetic control over erotic passion:

> Wherefore the shrine that is for most meet,
> Is one bright gleaming on some dangerous shore
> Where the slow dancers on gold sandalled feet
> May feel the sea wind sweep across the floor.

Clearly, there is danger ahead, since a storm is rising. Then again, the beautifully adorned dancers, who follow their steps unerringly, will not be rushed as they feel the tide starting to surge. The two other poems that follow the ode are a lyric, "The Apple," and a ballad titled "The Wanderer," in which the ceaselessly roaming voice asks, "Heard ye that laughter on the wind? / Farewell—I follow after it."

The remaining contributions, for the most part, have little to distinguish them. It is only when we reach the closing pages of *For Christmas MDCCCVIII* that we find T. E. Hulme's "Autumn," which is arguably the first proto-imagist poem to appear in print:

> A touch of cold in the Autumn night
> I walked abroad,
> And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge,
> Like a red-faced farmer
> I did not stop to speak, but nodded;
> And round about were the wistful stars
> With faces like town children.

Over time, "Autumn" has generated more scholarly inquiries than any other work that made its debut at the Poets' Club. The reason is that the poem,

written by an individual who acquainted himself deeply with the work of Remy de Gourmont and Henri Bergson, serves as a signal instance of poetic reorientation at this time. Rebecca Beasley observes that although Hulme's "Autumn"—together with another of his poems, "Above the Dock"—may address "a very traditional subject," the poem diverges from conventional treatments of the moon, which evoke her as a "muse on female beauty or love."[56] Instead, in Hulme's "Autumn" the moon is no longer elevated as a feminine ideal but unexpectedly peers over the hedge in the form of a sun-exposed man who works the fields. By the same token, the heavenly stars are brought just as firmly down to earth in the guise of "town children." Michael Levenson is quite right to claim that it is "the images themselves that come to attract poetic regard."[57] Hulme's two unorthodox similes, which relocate John Keats's sensuous "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" in the harsh countryside and a raw-edged city, also prove arresting because they are noticeably marked by class.[58] They speak to manual labor, on the one hand, and urban poverty, on the other hand. As Hulme stated in a lecture he delivered to the Poets' Club in December 1908, he had "no reverence for tradition." He had turned to poetry in order to express "certain impressions" that he "wanted to fix." His discovery of *vers libre* "seemed exactly to fit the case."[59] Even though he proved willing to accept that "poetry intended to be recited must be written in regular metre," he insisted that "this method of recording impressions by visual images in distinct lines does not require the old metric system."[60] By implication, his was a poetry—one that found some of its inspiration in the work of the French symbolist poet Gustave Kahn—to be read more on the page than spoken aloud.

Hulme, whose aesthetic moved in a direction contrary to Sackville's, was committed to the visual impressions that print could readily generate. On his model, *vers libre* did not require a recitative voice but relied instead on the exertions of the image. Interestingly, however, it was Sackville's poetry that struck the intensely hostile reviewer F. S. Flint, writing for A. R. Orage's influential *New Age*, as the finest in the volume. A largely self-taught man with great aptitude for modern languages, Flint begins his comments by juxtaposing the most recent edition of the two substantial French volumes of Adolphe van Bever and Paul Léautaud's *Poètes d'aujourd'hui* (1908)—which contain the work of such writers as Emile Verhaeren, whose poetry Flint had translated—to the very slim *For Christmas MDCCCCVIII*. Having noted that in the major anthology issued by Mercure de France the revered poets included there "fought for their art against ridicule," Flint characterizes the

Poets' Club as an "after-dinner discussion association." He finds little to commend even in Hulme's "Autumn," which in his view is simply a "quant conceit." As Flint sees it, the only poet whose work is worth reading is Sackville. "This one stanza, from an ode to Aphrodite," he says, with reference to the lines cited above, "outweighs almost the whole of the print of the other members." For the most part, he insists, "The Poets' Club is death."[61]

As Robert Ferguson reminds us, Hulme fought back.[62] In February 1909, Hulme was still willing to defend the Poets' Club. In a protest to the *New Age*, Hulme portrays Flint's tone as "sardonic, superior, and rather young."[63] The two men, however, decided to meet, and very soon Hulme invited Flint to join another circle of his at the Café Tour d'Eiffel, Percy Street, where the regular discussions with a largely Irish constituency—including Desmond Fitzgerald and Padraic Colum—became known as the Secession Club. One of its participants was F. C. Tancred, several of whose poems followed Hulme's in *For Christmas MDCCCCCVIII*. Here, too, we can see the beginnings of an innovative poetic through their study of haiku. Ferguson observes that Tancred's "On Finding Selwyn Image Not at Home When Calling upon Him" reveals the influence of Li Po's "On Visiting a Taoist Master in the Tai T'ien Mountains and Not Finding Him at Home."[64] This alternative activity did not entirely alienate Hulme from the Poets' Club. Nor was Pound—who encountered Hilaire Belloc, T. Sturge Moore, and George Bernard Shaw there—estranged from the club after the publisher Elkin Mathews introduced him to its members. Both Hulme and Pound contributed to the *Book of the Poets' Club*, which came out in December 1909. Pound, at least for a while, threw his weight behind it. A feature in the *Sketch* records that in early July 1909 Pound made his presence known at a "Salon held by the Poets' Club" that "went with a considerable swing." The "members and their guests," we learn, "were bent on proving that the Muse can make life, and an evening party, amusing." Amid the merriment, "Mr. Ezra Pound, the young poet whom the Academy rechristened Melchisidech Hundredweight, and Lady Margaret Sackville contributed poems to the evening's entertainment."[65] It is also almost as if, at this festive salon, an emergent male modernism and an elegant female traditionalism swayed to the same poetic rhythm. Later, in December 1909, Pound lectured the club on the Occitan troubadour Arnaut Daniel. But once the *Book of the Poets' Club* appeared, Hulme and Pound no longer associated themselves with the monthly meetings. By the middle of that year, Sackville, it is worth noting, was also devoting her energies elsewhere.

In late 1909, the *Review of Reviews* carried a notice that the *Poetical*—"the official journals of the Poetry Recital Society"—had just been published. "The aim of the Society, of which Lady Margaret Sackville is President," it noted, "is to bring together lovers of poetry with a view to extending and developing an intelligent interest in and proper appreciation of poetry." Once it listed the various dignitaries serving as "honorary members of the Society," the magazine observed that this organization was instituting a "course of reading and learning."[66] It seems that Sackville wanted this new society to attract as much publicity as possible. By April 1910, the society proposed an ambitious event that promised to raise the profile of poetry and poets, though in a manner that some sections of the press were quick to question. The plan was to hold a banquet for the living descendants of the nation's greatest bards. "Lady Margaret Sackville," the upper-crust *Tatler* commented, "is herself descended from two poets—Thomas Sackville Earl; of Dorset, a friend of Spenser, who wrote 'The Induction,' and Charles Sackville, the 6th earl, who wrote the famous song, 'To All You Ladies Now at Hand,' and was the friend and patron of Dryden."[67] But the premium that Sackville set on pedigree, which may have worked in her personal favor, failed to impress most critics. The *Bystander* could hardly believe that such a banquet should have taken place: "Feeding dead heroes' connections seems a cheery sort of charity, but it is an odd way of honouring men[,] a large number of whom starved in their lifetime."[68] Predictably, the *Academy* found the whole enterprise risible: "One would have thought that such a society would in the mass, at any rate, have possessed a sufficient sense of humour to perceive that the whole business is as fantastic and ridiculous as business well could be." No living poet of any rank, it observes, "has been procured to assist, and in some way to justify the proceedings."[69] By the time this event took place, however, Sackville had resigned the presidency. The reasons were unclear. Whether she exerted influence on the group's later events is also an open question. In November 1910, Lady Caroline Lindsay, author most recently of *A Venetian Balcony and Other Poems* (1903), addressed the members on the topic of "Women and Poetry": "she took as her first example of a woman poet Sappho."[70] The remainder of the lecture ranged widely, including references to Katherine Philips, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Adelaide Procter, and Christina Rossetti.

By 1912, when the Poetry Recital Society had transmuted into the Poetry Society, Sackville devised a model of poetic performance that seemed to go out of its way to avoid social embarrassment. In her inaugural address

as president of this new venture, she insisted that the best recitation avoided gesture, since "the speaking of verse is not acting."[71] Moreover, she wanted the recitative voice to impose "no striving from outside to produce a definite effect." Instead, such elocution meant that the reciter's voice should be "so possessed by the poem that it follows instinctively every modulation and inflection as easily as water flows between winding banks."[72] This, Sackville insists, is the "proper" approach toward elocution.[73] In taking note of Sackville's phrasing, Mark S. Morrisson acknowledges that the "cultural capital" that Sackville assumed should be invested in recitation arose from "class privilege," as well as the "professional training and credentials meted out by the Poetry Society."[74] It might also be said that Sackville's aspiration to enunciate "the voice alone," without any other performative intrusion, provided her with a model of poetic authority that to some degree looks like a counterpart to modernist theories of impersonality. Besides "possession," what she desired was "an attitude of surrender on the part of the speaker."[75] Such arguments have clear continuity with the ones that Sackville had advanced in "Women and Poetry." Here "Art's for Art's Sake" must be in the name of the poetical, not the personal. Yet the prospect of holding back one's own views—especially when war loomed on the horizon—soon presented Sackville with a challenge when it came to composing poetry that spoke to the role of women who were suffering severe losses through the carnage.

"Nostra Culpa": Women, Pacifism, and Outspokenness

"War," Sackville remarks in a 1916 feminist essay, "is to a large extent the result of affairs being conducted practically from the masculine standpoint alone." To be sure, she claims to hold no illusions that a "world . . . governed solely by women" would be any better. But she emphasizes that "the militarist and anti-feminist spirit work side by side."[76] The main consequence of the war for women, Sackville maintains, is that the hardships resulting from male members of a family serving in action (and often losing their lives as a consequence) have led to a steep rise in female poverty and unemployment. "Within a week" of the war breaking out, she notes, "thousands of women whose husbands had been called to fight were on the steps of the workhouse."[77] To prove her point, Sackville inserts a table that indicates the high numbers of women registered at Labour Exchanges. Particularly irritating to her is the misappropriation of English poetry as militaristic propaganda. A year later in Sheepshanks's *Ius Suffragii*, Sackville showed that poetry should

not be exploited to support the war: "Mr. Osborne, in the Morning Post, quotes exultingly some verse of Coleridge about 'My spear, my sword, my shaggy shield.' He bears out my contention. These people are living to all intents and purposes in another century. If it were a question of spears and swords and shaggy shields, well and good. . . . But substitute 'My bombs, my shells, my poisoned gas,' and I doubt whether the line would give much satisfaction."[78] As it turns out, the line that the commentator in the *Morning Post* quoted is far older than anything by Coleridge. This was a well-known translation of a poem by the Cretan warrior Hybrias, which appeared in the *Greek Anthology*. Her point, however, is well taken.

For Sackville's poetry, the most pressing wartime question was how to translate her feminist pacifism and socialism into a disciplined form that could speak with decorum. Her best-known poem in *The Pageant of War*, which made her politics clearer than ever before, is arguably "Nostra Culpa" ("Our Guilt"), which articulates a collective female voice that addresses a paradox: the crisis that has arisen through women's failure to protest the futility of modern militarism. "We spoke not," the collective voice says candidly, "so men died."[79] In steady-paced couplets, the women in unison provide a reason for their misguided silence: "Upon a world down-trampled, blood-defiled, / Fearing that men should praise us less, we smiled."[80] Male intimidation, they declare, had much to do with their unwillingness to remonstrate with what Sackville called "the masculine point of view": "We betrayed / Our sons; because men laughed we were afraid."[81] Yet rather than blame women entirely for this wrongdoing, the unified voice insists that theirs was a "silent wisdom," one that remained dormant until the most horrifying violence had taken place: "Children were slaughtered, women raped, the weak / Down-trodden."[82] The present moment, however, has brought about a shattering reckoning with the magnitude of women not taking responsibility for a share in the carnage: "What shall we plead? That we were deaf and blind? / We mothers and we murderers of mankind."[83] As "Nostra Culpa" reveals, its own performance as a poem is anguished by the fact that women have only been able to articulate their bitter regrets belatedly. The larger point of these devastating lines, whose alliteration stridently insists on the homicidal nature of maternity, is to suggest that women's poetry is still not vocal enough when it comes to the ravages of history. All that is left for the collective female voice, as Brian Murdoch has noted, is the possibility of "pleading a case before God, which justifies the adapted and pluralized liturgical title" of the poem.[84] Such pleading, which universalizes

the *mea culpa* of the *Confiteor* of the Catholic Mass, indicates that such outspokenness gains in legitimacy when it invokes a religious crisis.

Like Sackville's earliest poems that address femininity, "Reconciliation"—another of the finest lyrics in *The Pageant of War*—creates a hypothetical scenario. Here one woman addresses another, in the hope that the two of them "may meet" once "all the stress and the toil is over."[85] In quatrains that begin with three five-beat lines before contracting into one of just two spondaic-sounding feet, Sackville's voice looks forward to a time when the two of them (as both wives and mothers who have lost their men), "very quietly, without sound of speech, / Each shall greet each."[86] As these lines imply, a conversation will take place when the two women acknowledge that they failed to intervene in ways that would have prevented such deaths. Bound by the "same grief," she says, they will "ask . . . pardon from the other one / For her dead son." Their exchange, however, even if it consists of "such low, tender words" as "the heart may fashion," still has to contend with the thought that it inevitably dishonors the memory of those sons and lovers whose lives they did not save. The speaker is left with a melancholy thought: "Knowing that we disturb at every tread / Our mutual dead."[87] Somehow, the female voice—even as it tries to reconcile itself with women's complicity in the war—acknowledges that no matter how much it tries to make amends, with feet that tread as solemnly as possible, its poetic utterance still creates a disturbance.

These are, by any account, exceptionally powerful poems, and it is little surprise that they made their way into several anthologies throughout the early 1920s.[88] But even if the *Socialist Review* declared that these works revealed Sackville as "the best of our living women poets," her reputation underwent a rapid decline in the interwar period.[89] In 1937, when Sackville was in her late forties, W. B. Yeats confessed to having had second thoughts about omitting her from his canon-building *Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892–1935* (1936): "I regret having left out Margaret Sackville but the critics have not discovered her."[90] As I hope to have shown in this chapter, the time has certainly arrived for Sackville's rediscovery as an aesthete whose political commitments developed in an era of decadence and modernism. But as we can also tell, once the war began she also had to consider carefully a poetics that exerted control over her indictment of women's refusal to speak out against militarism. In both cases, she respected that her disciplined art form might be able to address these mixed ambitions and disappointments with due measures of propriety. Such measures were ones that befitted her

standing as a very public, finely presented, and most entitled lady: a significant legatee of aestheticism about whose life, despite her much-noted public visibility, we still have very little knowledge.

Notes

The author is grateful to Sam Dodd, Executive Assistant at the Poetry Society, London, for providing him with invaluable information. Lisa Wettleson of the Department of Special Collections, University of Wisconsin–Madison, shared several sample pages of the manuscript album that Sackville kept in the 1890s. Sarah Richardson, Keeper of Art at the Laing Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, arranged for the reproduction of George Henry's portrait of Margaret Sackville. The author would also like to thank Christopher Brennan, Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, for assistance with an interlibrary loan.

1. Michael Field, *Callirrhoë: Fair Rosamund* (London: George Bell, 1884), iv.

2. Walter Pater, "A Study of Dionysus," *Fortnightly Review* 20 (1876): 752; Lady Margaret Sackville, "A Hymn to Dionysus," in *A Hymn to Dionysus and Other Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905), 9

3. Pater, "Study of Dionysus," 752; Sackville, "Hymn to Dionysus," 10–11.

4. ["J.A."], review of *Lyrics*, by Margaret Sackville, *Poetry and Drama* 2 (1913): 249.

5. ["J.A."], review of *Lyrics*, 249.

6. Anonymous, "Periodical Notes," *Publishers' Weekly*, 2 Apr. 1910, 1462. The *Literary Post* appears not to have survived its first year of publication.

7. Report in the *Daily Mail*, quoted in "Local News," *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 9 June 1900, 8. Sackville's family developed the seaside resort of Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, which culminated in the building of the modernist De La Warr Pavilion in 1935.

8. See the commentary at "Grand Ladies": www.gogmsite.net/the-belle-epoque-1890-1914/lady-margaret-sackville-188.html.

9. Margaret Sackville, foreword to *Collected Poems of Lady Margaret Sackville* (London: Richards Press, 1939), 7.

10. Sackville, foreword to *Collected Poems*, 7.

11. Edith Finch, *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 1840–1922* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), 309.

12. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, preface to *Selected Poems*, by Lady Margaret Sackville (London: Constable, 1919), v, vi.

13. Elizabeth Longford quotes this line in *A Pilgrimage of Passion: The Life of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 338. The poem appears to remain unpublished.

14. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, "Le Roi est mort. Vive le Roi!," in *The Poetical Works of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1914), 1:355.

15. Blunt, "Youth and Knowledge," in *Poetical Works*, 1:355.

16. Blunt, "Youth and Knowledge," in *Poetical Works*, 1:355.

17. Longford, *Pilgrimage of Passion*, 337.

18. Helen Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries: Ezra Pound, H.D. and the Imagists* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), 116.

19. See, e.g., Ben Fenton, "Secret Love Affair of Labour Prime Minister and Lady Margaret Is Revealed 80 Years on," *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Nov. 2006, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1533044/Secret-love-affair-of-Labour-Prime-Minister-and-Lady-Margaret-is-revealed-80-years-on.html.

20. Kathryn Ledbetter, *British Victorian Women's Periodicals: Beauty, Civilization, and Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 40.

21. Ledbetter, *British Victorian Women's Periodicals*, 40.

22. "Women Writers at Dinner," *St. James's Gazette*, 26 June 1900, 15.

23. "Women Writers at Dinner," 15.

24. Lady Margaret Sackville, "Women and Poetry," *Womanhood* 6 (1901): 154.

25. Sackville, "Women and Poetry," 155.

26. Sackville, "Women and Poetry," 156.

27. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "A Musical Instrument," in *Last Poems* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1862), 56.

28. Lady Margaret Sackville, "Unrest," *Womanhood* 9 (1902–3): 4.

29. Amy Levy, "Magdalen," in *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1884), 70.

30. Lady Margaret Sackville, "Fallen," *Womanhood* 3 (1899–1900): 5.

31. Lady Margaret Sackville, introduction to *A Book of Verse by Living Women*, ed. Lady Margaret Sackville (London: Herbert & Daniel, 1910), xiii.

32. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xiii.

33. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xiii.

34. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xiv.

35. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xviii.

36. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xv.

37. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xvii.

38. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xvii.

39. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xix.

40. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xix.

41. Alice Meynell, "Renouncement," in Sackville, *Book of Verse by Living Women*, 112. The poem appears in Alice Meynell, *Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1893), 71.

42. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xx.

43. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xx.

44. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xx.

45. Michael Field, "The Beloved," in Sackville, *Book of Verse by Living Women*, 54.

The poem appears in Michael Field, *Wild Honey from Various Thyme* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 69.

46. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xxi.

47. Anna Bunston, "The Dead Praise Not Thee, O God," in Sackville, *Book of Verse by Living Women*, 29. The poem appears in Anna Bunston, *Mingled Wine* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), 37.

48. Rosalind Travers, "The Tramp," in Sackville, *Book of Verse by Living Women*, 245. The poem appears in Rosalind Travers, *The Two Arcadias: Plays and Poems* (London: Brimley Johnson, 1905), 142.

49. Sackville, introduction to *Book of Verse by Living Women*, xxi.

50. Frances Cornford, "To a Fat Lady Seen from a Train," in Sackville, *Book of Verse by Living Women*, 38. The poem appears in Frances Cornford, *Poems* (London: Priory, 1910), 21.

51. Spencer Leigh Hughes, "The Poets' Club," *Tatler*, 29 Apr. 1908, 120.

52. Anonymous, "Life and Letters," *Academy*, 31 Oct. 1908, 412.

53. Selwyn Image, "On the Unity of Art," *Century Guild Hobby Horse* 1, no. 5 (1887): 2.

54. Oscar Wilde, "Art at Willis's Rooms," *Sunday Times*, 25 Dec. 1887, 7, reprinted in Oscar Wilde, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 7, *Journalism Part II*, ed. John Stokes and Mark W. Turner (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 40.

55. Selwyn Image, "Christmas and New Year's Greetings," in *For Christmas MDCCCCVIII* [London: The Poets' Club, 1908]. Since this volume lacks pagination, I have not provided further references to its contents.

56. Rebecca Beasley, *Theories of Modernist Poetry: T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 37.

57. Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 46.

58. John Keats, "To Autumn," in *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, MA; Harvard UP, 1978), 360.

59. T. E. Hulme, "A Lecture on Modern Poetry," in *Further Speculations*, ed. Samuel Hynes (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1955), 68.

60. Hulme, "Lecture on Modern Poetry," 73.

61. F. S. Flint, "Recent Verse," *New Age*, 11 Feb. 1909, 327.

62. See Robert Ferguson, *The Short Sharp Life of T. E. Hulme* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 52–54.

63. T. E. Hulme, "Belated Romanticism," *New Age*, 18 Feb. 1909, 350.

64. Ferguson, *Short Sharp Life of T. E. Hulme*, 56.

65. Anonymous, "Small Talk," *Sketch*, 14 July 1909, 10. In its "Life and Letters" column, the *Academy* referred to Pound as "Melchizidick Hundredweight," noting that the poems that he had recently published in the *English Review* showed that Pound

wished "to appropriate for himself what is left of the mantle of Robert Browning" (5 June 1909, 172).

66. Anonymous, "The Poetical," *Review of Reviews* 40 (1909): 479.

67. Anonymous, "In Town and Out," *Tatler*, 2 Mar. 1910, 214.

68. Anonymous, "Descendants from the Poets Dine," *Bystander*, 13 Apr. 1910, 62.

69. Anonymous, "Dinners for Poets," *Academy*, 2 Apr. 1910, 320.

70. Anonymous, "Poetry Recital Society," *Morning Post*, 22 Nov. 1909, 2.

71. Lady Margaret Sackville, "The Art of Speaking Verse," *Poetical Gazette*, Sept. 1912, 455.

72. Sackville, "Art of Speaking Verse," 454.

73. Sackville, "Art of Speaking Verse," 455.

74. Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905–1920* (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 2001), 65.

75. Sackville, "Art of Speaking Verse," 455.

76. Margaret Sackville, "Women and War," *English Review* 23 (1916): 452.

77. Sackville, "Women and War," 454.

78. Lady Margaret Sackville, "On War and Human Nature," *Ius Suffragii*, 1 Aug. 1915, 328.

79. Lady Margaret Sackville, "Nostra Culpa," in *The Pageant of War* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1916), 36.

80. Sackville, "Nostra Culpa," 36.

81. Sackville, "Nostra Culpa," 37.

82. Sackville, "Nostra Culpa," 38.

83. Sackville, "Nostra Culpa," 39.

84. Brian Murdoch, "For Empire, England's Boys, and the Pageant of War: Women's War Poetry in the Year of the Somme," *English* 58 (2009): 41. Murdoch's is the most substantial analysis to date of Sackville's antiwar poems.

85. Sackville, "Reconciliation," in *Pageant of War*, 49.

86. Sackville, "Reconciliation," 49.

87. Sackville, "Reconciliation," 50.

88. Four poems from Sackville's *Pageant of War*, for example, appear in Bertram Lloyd, ed., *Poems Written during the Great War* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1918), 80–85, and one is reprinted in Sterling Andrus Leonard, ed., *Poems of the War and the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921), 137–38.

89. "J.R.M.," "War Unmasked," *Socialist Review* 13 (1916): 291.

90. W. B. Yeats, "To Dorothy Wellesley," 28 Feb. 1937, in *Letters on Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1940), 143.

5 The Queer Drift of Firbank

Ellis Hanson

> I feel his books are all written in hotels, with the bed unmade at the back of a chair.
>
> Ronald Firbank regarding his own novels in *The Flower Beneath the Foot*

Ronald Firbank adrift: his never sounding quite at home anywhere and yet his being always exquisitely and unassailably himself in any book and on any occasion, however unreadable he seemed to others. This paradox of solipsism and borderlessness defines not only the accounts of his awkward sociability, his habitual tourism, his accommodating every foreign influence into his own queer Englishness, but also his stylistic tendency to parataxis, non sequitur, and languorous indirection. For the quintessential image we retain of him, misleading though it may be, we might consider Nancy Cunard's description of him at the Café Royal in London: "Characteristically Firbank was at a table alone, sometimes giggling for no apparent reason, observing everything which went on around him, and often reaching one hand to clasp the other shoulder, drawing it inward and sitting as it were cupped within himself."[1] At the Café Royal or anywhere in his frequent journeys, through Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and the West Indies, he was a paradox of perfect *flâneur* and exquisite solipsist, turned attentively outward at the world and protectively inward at his own dream of it at the same time. His pithy remark about writing his novels in hotels was often literally true about him, and the unmade bed adds a suitably salacious hint of the morning after the night before, despite our having little evidence of his ever having slept with another human being. He is not speaking simply biographically or thematically about his novels here, however, but more importantly offering us a metaphor for his style, the impression he leaves

of his own aesthetic sensibility, whether it alights literally in hotels or not. There is something of the short sojourn, the luxuriously peripatetic, in the structure of his brief novels, not to mention the very syntax of his sentences, whether languorously extended or enigmatically truncated to a single word, as if he were outstaying his welcome even as he quickly changed rooms in the same hotel.

Even his reputation is adrift, wandering in and out of the literary canon, as he is dismissed and deemed a genius, sometimes in the course of the same critique by a range of admirers possessed of a passionate ambivalence or a celebratory apologetics on his behalf. He is one of the great comic stylists of the English language, certainly the premier comic stylist of the twentieth century, more challenging and distinctive and audacious as a stylist than Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, Evelyn Waugh, E. F. Benson, P. G. Wodehouse, or Noël Coward, those amusing aesthetes, whether fin de siècle or modernist or both, with whom he is most often compared. He is also a more original and distinctive stylist than many other novelists who have been canonized as great modernists, more than E. M. Forster or Ford Madox Ford, more than F. Scott Fitzgerald or D. H. Lawrence, even though they invariably upstage him, even displace him, on any syllabus for a survey of modernist fiction. He has gained a dubious literary reputation for little more than having a dubious literary reputation, even though a distinguished roster of novelists and poets have commented on his significance, among them Edmund Wilson (his most astute early critic), Osbert Sitwell, E. M. Forster, W. H. Auden, Carl Van Vechten, Anthony Powell, Cyril Connolly, Susan Sontag, Brigid Brophy, and Alan Hollinghurst. Harold Bloom recalled his own passion for the novels of Firbank, whom he admitted "alas is not for the common reader," and he included them in his list of the great literary pillars of the Western canon, though—alas!—hardly anyone seems to have agreed.[2] Steven Moore made much the same point about Firbank's dwindling critical fortune in a bibliographical preface more than twenty years ago, but the news has only grown worse.[3]

It was sometime late in the previous century that I published criticism on Firbank as decadent,[4] so I thought I should read up on all the new scholarship on him since then. Having finished all that homework *later the same afternoon*, I concluded that if it had not been for a very few critics with a deep commitment to Gay Studies in modernism, there would hardly have been anything written about Firbank at all in the past quarter century. My own mistake in writing about him was to assume that he was already legible

as high modernism and to discuss his celebration of Oscar Wilde (as Brophy had established it in great detail in *Prancing Novelist*)[5] and the decadent literature of the previous generation, a gesture that could only further alienate him from the vexed and often hypocritical disavowals of decadence that have been commonplace in modernist scholarship and self-definition. I have learned to teach his work alongside the novels of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Djuna Barnes, and Samuel Beckett to make him more recognizable, more audible, as a queer renegade and an innovative and challenging experiment in style. Kevin Ohi has described it as Firbank's "extreme style" and "an extreme form of aestheticism and decadence." He adds, "The trope of decadence makes it difficult to imagine what comes after it (other than death), and the decadents themselves privileged the sterility of their work—as an end in itself, or a dead end."[6] In other words, Firbank's unplaceability in a narrative of tradition may be the most queer and decadent thing about him, stylistically begotten by no one and begetting no one, a sui generis realization of his own style from start to finish. Criticism on modernism, however, has slowly acknowledged this possibility of dead ends that failed even to die, a decadence that outlived Oscar Wilde and the nineteenth century and helped to define the innovations of the twentieth century, "the modernism that will emerge as a reinvention of decadence and not just a riposte to it," as Vincent Sherry has written.[7] Sherry never mentions Firbank in this discussion, but on a similar note Alex Murray wisely singles him out for praise as "the last true Decadent," an example of "the literature of modernism that merged in the 1910s and 1920s" as "an evolution of Decadent style."[8] I can only hope that the centenary of Firbank's novels brings a long overdue reappraisal of his significance.

The American critic Carl Van Vechten wrote of Ronald Firbank, "To be 1890 in 1890 might be considered almost normal. To be 1890 in 1922 might be considered almost queer." The almost queer Van Vechten himself sounds very 1890 in this epigram. I think he does mean this line to be a compliment, and he was personally responsible for a good deal of the very small quantity of critical praise that Firbank enjoyed during his lifetime. In this phrase, he sums up two principle reasons, among many, why Firbank's novels have mysteriously resisted canonization: he is too decadent and too queer. He is also too worshipful of the genius of Oscar Wilde and of the 1890s at a time when Wilde represented the decadence that new literature tried to transcend in order to be modern, even though Firbank's style does not resemble

that of Wilde or much of anything else that was written in 1890 apart from Beardsley's equally underappreciated classic *Under the Hill*. "Ronald Firbank was not an imitator," his biographer points out astutely. "His mature work can be associated with fin de siècle writers, especially those of France, in his reliance on technique rather than explicit statement to present his subject, but the technique is his own."[9] It may be that criticism, even in the heyday of queer theory, mostly just did not know how to place him. It did not get his queer drift, his very embodiment and stylization of drift, in both his life and his art, though this distinctively queer style is his greatest accomplishment for modernism.

Like his characters, Firbank remains for us in every imaginable way adrift. "*Of course* Firbank was a gypsy," Brigid Brophy writes of him, tartly. "He was a nomad (though a fashionable one who caused 'advertisements of his arrivals from abroad . . . to appear in *The Times* and the *Morning Post*')."[10] The man himself wandered from one address to another, from one foreign country to another, a near-constant tourist, and his comic vision of decadent Englishness is frequently a racial and ethnic hybrid, rendered strangely through the accents and mise-en-scène of his travels in Spain, Italy, the Middle East, North Africa, Cuba, or Jamaica—going to the West Indies, as he said only half ironically, "to live among the Negroes so as to collect material for a novel about Mayfair."[11] He could write a surprisingly astute modernist novel about New York without ever visiting it. As Alex Murray has noted, "Firbank's lightness of touch and baroque comedy were perfectly suited to capturing the excesses of Jazz Age Manhattan in his final, unfinished novel *The New Rythum*," and yet he had never been there and wrote it instead while drifting down the Nile. An aspect of both his decadence and his modernism, this stylistic estrangement of vividly realized landscapes and local accents and stock characters in disorienting circumstances allows him to transgress the conventional borders of nation, dialect, and sexual morals while remaining firmly and uncannily within a Firbankian geography that has customs, speech, rhythms, and a sensibility of its own. His plots, insofar as they transpire at all, are continually interrupted by tittering distractions and trail off with little resolution, as, for example, in the final lines of *Valmouth*, when Niri-Esther, who passes for a romantic heroine, fails properly to marry and, with her bridal bouquet in hand, wanders off in wayward pursuit of a butterfly. Firbank's dialogue is often preoccupied and self-absorbed, so overripe with obscene innuendo, so disoriented by non sequiturs, and so jagged

with characters speaking comically at cross-purposes or speaking of one thing while thinking about something entirely unrelated that it can easily drift free of any actual words and trail off into Gothic crosses, ellipses, exclamation points, and question marks, sometimes for whole lines or whole paragraphs. For example, there is a much-cited paragraph from his novel *The Flower Beneath the Foot* that is supposedly the prayer of the socialite and future saint Laura de Nanzianzi, who is outraged that her lover has absconded, as she says, with a negress, but the page consists almost entirely of ellipses, hundreds of dots interrupting a few prayerful exclamations, as if what she was really thinking were too outrageous even for words. There is nothing like this passage in fin-de-siècle literature, and there is nothing like it elsewhere in modernism; rather, it is a quintessentially Firbankian stylistic flourish that evokes both the character's speculations and our own, cast adrift in a sea of elliptical speculation—yet we do feel we get the drift after all.

One of the greatest challenges in Firbank criticism now is to read his most colonial novel, *Sorrow in Sunlight* (1924), a comical story about a native West Indian family that tries to climb the social ladder in a community of snobbish British socialites on yet another fictional island, this one resembling Cuba or Jamaica, which Firbank had visited. It is a great work of literature, it is usually deemed to be one of his best novels, it is a very queer novel, it is a bizarre exercise in English dialect, and there is nothing else like it in the English language; in the postcolonial era, however, it will probably be unjustly doomed to obscurity as a distasteful curiosity. First of all, Firbank was persuaded by Van Vechten to change the title of the American edition to *Prancing Nigger*, which is also the nickname given to one of the novel's minor characters by his own family. Ironically, in 1924 that new title helped it become his bestselling novel, but now the title strikes most readers at first glance as hopelessly racist and homophobic, though Firbank likely intended it to be neither. The novel also includes passages of dialogue in a Creole dialect that is not quite realistic, or even consistent, but rather exuberant, a stylistic flourish played for comedy, however affectionately. As Peter J. Bailey has said in his meditation on the possibility of a West Indian decadent tradition, "Firbank deploys Creole in this parodic mode—not to capture any of the reality of the languages he heard spoken on his trips, but for aesthetic effect, as yet another register of language that could be used to give the effect of complicated literary style."[12] Although it certainly invites a formalist reading of this complicated style, the most recent criticism on this novel has

been justly and pointedly ideological. It seems fairly effortless at this point in history to interrogate the ethical problems of this particular British man crossing these particular colonial boundaries to write this kind of novel, and the same problem emerges for the sexual tourism of any number of white gay writers in the modernist canon, from Wilde and Gide to Forster and Genet.

The most rigorous attempt to read *Prancing Nigger* as a queer anti-colonial novel is Christopher Lane's chapter on Firbank from his book *The Ruling Passion*.[13] Despite some formalist gestures, Lane offers an essentially ideological defense of the novel as a satire of British colonial snobbery, which it is. It seems to me a satire of both the British and the West Indian, though it carries on the fine tradition of camp aesthetics in adoring the very object of its parody. I doubt that anyone will find Firbank to have been remotely well informed about West Indian politics or even especially progressive in his opinions, though he certainly was fascinated by and identified with what little he saw of black culture. To say he was somehow politically correct may or may not help us to understand why the style of this novel is so original or so compelling, or how it was his style more than his explicit politics that queered the many ethnic, sexual, and national boundaries that he so deliriously drifted across and blurred in his fiction. Lane wisely points out the comic focus on racial miscegenation and homoeroticism in the novel: all the characters seem to desire someone socially inappropriate, and even the white cat Snowball has black kittens. This mixing of ethnicities and sexualities seems more importantly an allegory for Firbank's style. He delights in the absurd hybridity of his own language, his own stylistic estrangement from conventional Britishness, the queer failures of reference as well as the queer connections that these different dialects effect as the characters endlessly talk at cross-purposes.

I will visit here just the most celebrated passage in this novel: when a major earthquake occurs, but it actually fails to interrupt the novel's plot or even the bizarre conversations of its characters. Firbank notes that "three stolid matrons, matrons of hoary England, evidently not without previous earthquake experience, were ignoring resolutely the repeated shocks."[14] One of the women notes ironically, "I always follow the Fashions, dear, at a distance!" Quite a distance, if her irony and Firbank's own are any measure! The real jolts come through the queerness of Firbank's style, as if he were himself enacting through it a far greater disruption than any merely thematic earthquake or sexual transgression he might evoke. We are then treated to

an exquisitely Firbankian passage describing a crowd as they exit the opera house during the quake and, instead of panicking, immediately seek out trysts with the crowd in the local park, which is apparently full of prostitutes, male and female:

> By the Park palings a few 'Salvationists' were holding forth, while, in the sweep before the bandstand, the artists from the Opera, in their costumes of Aïda, were causing almost a greater panic among the ignorant than the earthquake itself. A crowd, promiscuous rather than representative, composed variously of chauffeurs (making a wretched pretence, poor chaps, of seeking out their masters), Cyprians, patricians (these in opera cloaks and sparkling diamonds), tourists, for whom the Hodeidah girls would *not* dance that night, and bwam-wam bwam-wams, whose equivocal behaviour, indeed, was perhaps more shocking even than the shocks, set the pent Park ahum. Yet, notwithstanding the upheavals of Nature, certain persons there were bravely making new plans.

"Promiscuous rather than representative" would seem to be the operative phrase in this sentence, not only for the upheavals of nature but also for the upheavals of style. The crowd is certainly more promiscuous than representative in its erotic, ethnic, and socioeconomic variety, but it is the prose that dazzles and distracts. The frame of reference for Hodeidah girls and bwam-wam bwam-wams is daunting enough for the uninitiated who are trying to understand the winkingly queer allusions that are highlighted by distracting scare quotes and italics and that are apparently more shocking than the shocks of the quake, but the syntax is also disorienting with its oddly arhythmical parenthetical asides that are more suggestive than descriptive, concluding at last with a weak verb and predicate ("set the pent Park ahum") that had lost sight of its subject several lines earlier. To understand the queer boundaries of this text requires not only an ideological critique but also a queer formalism that attends to the erotics of style. There is a quake in discourse itself here, and its queer upheaval is erotic, transnational, and, above all, stylistic.

The keynote of Firbank's aesthetic is this languorous and distracted drift that defies every imaginable boundary, not only the drift of a perfect *flâneur* from place to place and from object to object, but also the drift of language itself with its uncertain foothold in any reality, any upheaval of nature, it might endeavor to name. Firbank is an improbably English version of the concept of linguistic and readerly drift and deferral, of *dérive* and *différance*

and *destinerrance*, so fundamental to French post-structuralism, and yet it is surprising to find that his modernist stylistic experimentation was almost never discussed through the work of critics such as Jacques Derrida or Roland Barthes, even when they were most influential in readings of British modernism. So like Firbank to be the occasion of yet another missed opportunity! I shall try to be brief, very brief, on this critical point about the drift of the letter, but it suggests why Firbank should have been essential to theories of literary modernism, even queer theories of literary modernism, even at a time when he was hardly deemed to be. *Destinerrance* is a punning term coined, though never quite defined, by Derrida and evoked in a few of his works, especially in *The Post Card*, where he used it to describe the unpredictable agency of the letter (of the signifier in particular, of course, but also of its mail carriers, of epistles, of postcards) as it wanders aimlessly from reader to reader, continually being reread and perhaps even misread, if misreading is even possible. The term is a splendid mash-up of destiny, destination, and errancy and was deployed by Derrida to critique Jacques Lacan's striking psychoanalytic assertion (by way of Poe's story "The Purloined Letter") that in some sense the letter always arrives at its proper destination. How could something so seemingly random, so hopelessly adrift, as a signifier, a word, even an epistle or postcard on its uncertain mission to a particular addressee, ever enjoy such structural certitude, such perfect handling and reception, as to arrive always at its proper destination? What happens when the letter swerves en route? As Derrida writes of his term *destinerrance* in "My Chances," "This deviation alone can change the course of an imperturbable destination and inflexible order. Such erring (elsewhere I call it 'destinerring') can contravene in the laws of destiny, in conventions or contracts, in agreements of the *fatum*."[15] For Derrida, to put it simply, wherever the letter arrives, there it properly is, for the moment. It arrives at its proper destination by virtue of being read, which is also to say that it has no predeterminable destination, no certain effects or consequences, no ultimate addressee. As J. Hillis Miller explains, "The letter creates the recipient, unpredictably, incalculably, by chance or even by error. The letter reaches that recipient by *destinerrance*."[16]

Firbank wrote an entire novel, *The Artificial Princess*, that reads like a comic meditation on *destinerrance*. In a backhanded tribute to Oscar Wilde, Firbank imagines a modernist princess who tries to reenact the story of Salome by seducing a local priest, but her love letter, which she has entrusted

to her friend the Baroness, passes absurdly through several hands and fails to reach him, though the Princess herself is never told and pursues her amour with puzzling consequences:

> The better for wine, it seemed the chauffeur had left the letter at some Inn, to be delivered by some stable-boy, at some time during his convenience, who, in turn, had entrusted the letter to a van passing the Saint's doorstep on the course of its rounds, laden with the creations of the "Maison Greuze."
>
> At the Schloss of the Countess Elsassar, the Wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the van had been driven back to the capital almost by swords to fetch a piece of passementerie, and the driver had been so harassed thereat that he had forgotten altogether the Princess's note. The unopened letter scorching her bosom the Baroness was at a loss.[17]

The phrase "at a loss" would niftily describe nearly every character at every moment in this novel, and scorched bosoms abound as erotic intentions are read at cross-purposes with such reliable randomness that *destinerrance* achieves the level of farce, though it manages to defy even the sort of topsy-turvy logic and closure we find in Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The reader too, like the letter, is waylaid with such distractions as the Countess Elsassar and the Maison Greuze, who exist in the text purely as art for art's sake, one of many pieces of "passementerie" in this novel that are, like the word itself, some decadent stylistic decoration with an aesthetic life of its own.

One could argue that every text and every reader is beset by such *destinerrance*, but Firbank writes as if the author too were in a drifting mood, distracted from the progress of his own novel, or even his own sentence. This drift that fails to respect the whole recalls Paul Bourget's frequently cited remark, "A decadent style is one where the unity of the book decomposes to give place to the independence of the page, where the page decomposes to give place to the independence of the phrase, and the phrase to give place to the word."[18] Roland Barthes perhaps best defines this readerly, even writerly, drift, this *dérive*: "The pleasure of the text is not necessarily of a triumphant, heroic, muscular type. No need to throw out one's chest. My pleasure can very well take the form of a drift. *Drifting* [*Dérive*] occurs whenever *I do not respect the whole*, and whenever, by dint of seeming driven about by language's illusions, seductions, and intimidations, like a cork on the waves, I remain motionless, pivoting on the *intractable* bliss that binds me to the text (to the world). Drifting occurs whenever social lan-

guage, the sociolect, *fails me* (as we say: *my courage fails me*)."[19] Firbank was certainly not a "triumphant, heroic, muscular type," and those moments when the drift of his prose defies the sociolect of the modern realist novel are indeed a bliss unique to his style. The intractable "bliss" here is a translation of the Lacanian term *jouissance*. Barthes is claiming here that we cannot help but be distracted by our *jouissance* in the text; we drift toward it unconsciously, we do a certain languorous violence to the text to find the traces of a more disruptive erotic enjoyment that the sociolect tries to tame. Here, he is speaking of readerly *jouissance*, the inevitability of the reader's own sensuality in uncertain communication with the text at hand, but Firbank raises the question for us of an obscure, writerly *jouissance*, one that seems to mimic through its style our own tendency to drift, to take unconscious or unintended enjoyment in the text. For Barthes, this *jouissance* is not a discourse that one can inhabit or even realize except in distracted glimpses, since it interrupts and dissolves the logical bonds of social discourse itself. He offers a warning: "However, if one were to manage it, the very utterance of drifting today would be a suicidal discourse."[20] For Barthes, it seems to be a long and lovely suicide, and Firbank would be a prime example of this extreme style of drifting in its comic form, a kind of farce of sensual distraction and dissolution.

The queerest example I could give of this Firbankian *dérive* is a scene of a boat indeed adrift in a lake. In one of the most exquisite chapters he ever wrote, the odd divagation to visit the Count Cabinet in *The Flower Beneath the Foot*, the Countess of Tolga and Olga Blumenghast set off somewhat inexplicably together in a wide-bottomed sailing-boat called *Calypso* to bring a pannier of pears and pederastic poems to the disgraced Count, who lives in exile on his own little one-acre island of Saint Helena with his lover, Peter Passer, a similarly disgraced young chorister who now serves, euphemistically, as a "'useful' secretary and amanuensis."[21] The excursion is a distraction midway through the novel in that it occurs suddenly for no urgent reason, goes nowhere, and introduces characters that are soon left behind. In midlake, Tolga and Olga, who are not easily distinguished either in name or in person, find themselves hopelessly becalmed. They never arrive at the Count's island, where he would deem them a nuisance anyway. The true purpose of their trip seems to be to provide Firbank with a queer allegory for his own prose style and narrative structure. The novel itself is at this point suspended in a strange and voluptuous calm during which the sexual agitation of the two women toward each other becomes increasingly palpable, if

never quite nameable. Ravished by nothing more specific than the sibilant beauty of the afternoon (seagulls, stillness, censia-trees along the shore), Olga bursts into tears, and the two women melt into an unspecified lesbian enthusiasm for each other. We are unsure whether what we have just read is indeed what we think it might be, but we are then swiftly distracted with a description of Count Cabinet, whose ogling attention has wandered from his pet swans to his naked chorister diving in the breakwater, then back to his pet swans and then idly to the women in the boat, whom he observes through his private spyglass at apparently just the right moment to witness whatever intimate lesbian goings-on are underway. Never has voyeurism in a novel seemed quite so languorous, its very syntax at once agitated and becalmed in an extended drift. A single sentence will suffice:

> When not boating or reading or feeding his swans, to watch Peter's fancy-diving off the terrace end was perhaps the favourite pastime of the veteran *viveur*: to behold the lad trip along the riven breakwater, as naked as a statue, shoot out his arms and spring, the *Flying-head-leap* or the *Backsadilla*, was a beautiful sight, looking up now and again—but more often now—from a volume of old Greek verse; while to hear him warbling in the water with his clear alto voice—of Kyries and Anthems he knew no end—would often stir the old man to the point of tears.

More comic, sensual tears! The twists and turns of the syntax, the self-interruptions, the pointed italics, the extravagant indirection, the general artiness, the lingering over distracting asides for their own sake, the humorous euphemisms that leave nothing covered—these all become the stylistic equivalent of the scene of queer eroticism he is trying to evoke without quite naming it.

At the point when the Count's gaze finally comes to linger on the women in the sailing-boat, Firbank interrupts with an ironically polite digression on the subject of his own metaphors that turns out to be a subtle suggestion that the Count has commenced to masturbate—that he is "transfixed and loath just then for company," and so we should perhaps read something else for a moment and stop ogling his ogling. When we learn of the Count's spyglass that it is an "unrivalled instrument," which is, "like most instruments of merit, sensitive to the manner of its manipulation," Firbank might be referring to the spyglass, or obliquely to the erection the Count is stroking, or to the sensitive manipulations of perspective in his own prose style. As the women drift back to the shore whence they began, we hear only suggestive fragments of a vaguely postcoital conversation, a dialogue all askew, that

seems to enact through its style the very queer uncertainties that it otherwise fails to describe. The Countess asks, "Tell me, Olga: Is my hat all sideways?" Firbank gives us Olga's speechless reply as a mere ellipsis a dozen suggestive dots long: ". . . . . ." The very style of his sentences and the structure of his narrative hold desire in voluptuous suspension and then cast it adrift in sudden and indiscriminate dalliances of no particular consequence. They certainly never cohere into any structure resembling a sexual orientation, as it would be difficult to call this scene distinctly hetero or homo or even auto in its eroticism, so random is the object of desire. Even the seagulls and swans seduce. In its queerness, the chapter answers equally well to the name of decadence and modernism: it may or may not sound like 1890 in 1922, just as Firbank may or may not feel as Count Cabinet does when the night falls too quickly for his pornographic enjoyment: "'Oh, why was I not *sooner*?' he murmured distractedly aloud."

To say that Firbank's novels are easily distracted or cast our attention adrift is not to say that they lack psychological complexity, though the accusation is commonly leveled at him. His drifting is, rather, the essence of his complexity, his ability to capture conflicting levels of consciousness in the same paragraph and even the same sentence, in the same utterance or gesture of a character. His characters are indeed comically incapable of a successful repression or any serious feelings of shame about their transgressions, but this comedy is precisely what gives voice to psychological conflict so obscenely and delightfully. His comedy misleads us into supposing that his discourse is light when in fact the density of his style bucks off the casual reader at every turn and can leave us feeling that we have missed an allusion, a joke, a salacious hint because we ourselves are the distracted and inattentive ones. Consider his ability to specify the work of fantasy that at every turn comically undermines, ironizes, distracts, and otherwise disrupts the most banal of utterances by his characters. Just a glance, then, or an ogle perhaps, at his 1919 novel *Valmouth*, just a few pages in which, amid a distressing thunderstorm, a nominally Catholic society maven named Mrs. Hurstpierpoint languidly interrogates her gossipy kitchen maid, suitably named Fowler, about the sexual goings-on in connection to the lady's own presumptive heir and his dubious fiancée. "What is that thick, twine-coloured linen book I see the back of, beneath the young mistress's shawl?" the lady inquires, as if it were the misbehaving but finely veiled backside of the fiancée herself that had accidentally exposed itself in the room in her own absence. We think we shall soon get to the bottom of something essential to a courtship plot—or

any plot, really, but no. We are invited to judge this book, voluptuously thick, by its upturned cover, whose linens resolve themselves sheerly by nuance into a twine by whose mere color the reader is expected to tug the threads more tightly, but the revelation of the title, even an effort to read aloud from it, leads nowhere and comes of nothing but Firbank's celebration of his own elusive style. At first, we are told that the text is an obscene work of anthropology about some otherwise obscure and unmentionable tribe, but it soon resolves itself into somewhat more literary fare, *Tales from Casanova*, a translation and apparently unfaithful third-person retelling of the great libertine's memoirs, from which Fowler commences to read aloud for the drifting delectation of her hopelessly distracted mistress.

Firbank appears to have invented this edition, which we glimpse only in winking snatches and which we gather is none too faithful to the original Venetian source. It appears to be another evocation of old gossip rendered new by the imaginative efforts of a retelling; in other words, Firbank offers an unfaithful retelling of the maid's unfaithful retelling of the book's unfaithful retelling about gossip, even gossip about gossip, and all of it is cast deliriously adrift from its ostensible source. Fowler cracks the book open conveniently to an account of Casanova's dalliances with the sisters Nanetta and Marta, here misnamed as "Manette and Marton," but she falters at the first sign of a sexual impropriety in the tale: "'The disposition of these fair Venetians was such that——, such——,' she floundered."[22] Casanova himself was explicit enough on the "disposition" of the sisters, which resonate well with the varieties of homosexual, incestuous, intergenerational, and extramarital naughtiness that queer the characters of *Valmouth* and every other Firbank novel, but this rendering of Fowler's rendering of the *Tales*' rendering of Casanova's gossip about his own exploits is much more elliptical and therefore all the more inviting to speculation, though Mrs. Hurstpierpoint herself scarcely listens to the tale once the maid overcomes her own initial coyness.

The lady listens somewhat too selectively to the narrative, as her own multitasking mind drifts comically to her own speculations about the romance of her heirs, and all the while she tells the beads of her rosary in a distracted, half-hearted effort at prayer:

> Mrs. Hurstpierpoint plied speculatively her beads, catching between her *Aves* just enough of the tale to be able to follow its drift.
>
> Music, she heard. Those sisters ✠ a ripe and rich marquesa ✠ strong proclivities ✠ a white starry plant ✠ water ✠ lanterns ✠ little streets ✠ Il Redentore

✠ Pasqualino ✠ behind the Church of ✠ Giudecca ✠ gondola ✠ Lido ✠ Love ✠ Lagoon ✠ Santa Orsola ✠ the Adriatic——.

Firbank is offering us one of his many allegories of reading Firbank: a study in drifting attention, which is not quite the same thing as inattention, since his drift offers more by way of suggestive indirection than Casanova ever revealed by way of a more compulsively exhibitionistic and literal demonstration. Her efforts at multitasking are comically disorienting for her and for us, and between the fragments of sexual gossip, Firbank repeatedly interjects a cross pattée, better known in less precise typographical company as a Maltese cross, a sign conventionally used to mark a Christian site on a map, though at this point we feel that the Christianity in this novel has lost its way. If the crosses clearly indicate anything, I would say they mark the mechanical repetitions of prayer, perhaps even the lady's literally crossing herself as she prays, though she wanders confusingly from site to site in the Venetian tale. These crosses also figure as ornate and eccentric Christian exclamation points, elliptical expressions of affect, doubtful attempts at sublimation, in the midst of a salacious train of thought that should rightly scandalize the lady but clearly does not. The crosses could just as easily represent the mechanical repetitions not just of prayer but perhaps also of an elided sexual act in a gondola that she hears or imagines but would prefer not to acknowledge in front of the servants, that she seems to mark with a cross and perhaps a pious glance in a more polite direction away from her various readers, ourselves among them. We are left to speculate about the choice of words to which she does attend. The evocation of "strong proclivities" and a "ripe" marquesa teases us in an understandably sexual direction, but then it is followed by "a white starry plant," which seems random and enigmatic here, at once too plainly literal and too elusively symbolic as we try to make sense of the parataxis—and then try to account for the otherwise unmentioned little Pasqualino (is he an exclamation, a boy, a saint, a charming gondolier?) and try to locate ourselves in connection to various Venetian churches and bodies of water. We look to Casanova in vain to fill in the blanks of this narrative. Prayer becomes the macaronic punctuation for a no less macaronic sexual escapade, apparently involving a gondola adrift, as if saintly and sexual and literary exclamations had communicated on the page, grown indistinguishable, and then drifted off past the canals and the Lido beach, beyond the lagoon, into the Adriatic, altogether out to sea, along with the gondola itself, the lady's train of thought, her spiritual redemption, her sense

of household order, our own readerly attention, and the English language itself, to resign all hope of further clarification, as often occurs in Firbank, to an elongated and suggestive dash like a last gasp over who knows what indiscretion or ennui.

"With a sigh at the mutability of things," the lady drifts on, speculating about the shifts in her own family relations, until she is again distracted—her "cogitations were interrupted"—by the jarring appearance of Mrs. Thoroughfare, who has brought Sister Ecclesia for tea even though the obscenely chattering nun has taken a vow of silence that has rendered her all but hysterical and truly irrelevant at table. What follows is a quintessentially Firbankian minefield of non sequiturs, puzzling references and allusions, distracting parenthetical elaborations, seemingly random gossipy asides overripe with innuendo, and sudden divagations into French, Italian, and Church Latin, all of which are unfailingly humorous, sexually suggestive, and exquisitely crafted, though their drift is indeed sometimes maddening to follow. The reader, if not the lady herself, is treated to a distracting paragraph detailing the history of Sister Ecclesia's vow, then a page of disjointed and salacious dialogue shifting obscurely among the ladies and the servants with a tendency to parenthetic addenda and italicized emphasis, followed by Mrs. Thoroughfare, who is singing the entirety of a plaintive and fin-de-siècle "old French air" (love, *lilacs . . .*), untranslated, only tangentially relevant, fully four quatrains long, the author and composer of which (Bouchor, set to music by Chausson?) Firbank never bothers to identify. A casual evocation of the ultramontane priest Père Ernest (a Wildean touch) picking his nose during a confession serves as an unlikely reminder for Mrs. Hurstpierpoint to gather her nectarines, which seem themselves to be the sensual protagonists in some improbable confession only tenuously disclosed—"Your nectarines . . . ?" The narrative focalization around Mrs. Hurstpierpoint continually falters and recomposes itself around unlikely objects, as when Mrs. Thoroughfare, evidently bored and "fiddle-faddling" at the window, spies a "negress" with a kite on the lawn, presumably Mrs. Yajñavalkya, a character who occupies her attention and ours for the rest of this chapter and the next, but who sends the hostess herself into another sudden and mysterious religious reverie—and so we leave her sunken humbly but inexplicably to her knees.

The scene also focalizes unexpectedly around the consciousness and subplots of the servants, as in this sentence on the daydreams of the kitchen maid, which begins with an enigmatic remark on "wobbling" religious con-

versions in the household but then veers off, disorientingly, into what could be a full novel's worth of romance as she cops a look at the butler's gams: "'I know of more than one in the house to be wobbling!' Fowler averred as with rush-like gait at the view of the butler's crane-like legs, harbinger of the tea-board (in the dark of his mind might he not aspire to build with her? Swoop! Fly to church with her: make a nest of her? Snatch at her? Bend her, break her—God knew how!—to his passions' uses?), she flexibly withdrew." The syntax of this single sentence, punctuated with multiple question marks, with exclamation points and hyphens, with dashes within parentheses, struggles to contain the various levels of the maid's consciousness, shifting from her spoken assertion that scarcely occupies her own attention, to her physical gestures that belie her disconcertion, to the elaborate free indirect discourse about a spicy sexual fantasy she may never realize with a butler who may well be oblivious to her. The modifiers call attention to unconscious sexual motives—"wobbling," "rush-like," "crane-like," "flexibly"—conspiring with the pornographic verbs to lend an obscene significance to Fowler's numerous efforts at self-restraint even as Firbank dismisses her abruptly, if suggestively, from the remainder of the chapter. With similarly mysterious motives that excite vague mystical and erotic speculation, the nun makes a similar exit: "But with the French song over Sister Ecclesia had edged, with much wild grace, from the room." Gimlet-eyed, the exceedingly free indirect discourse of the narration takes in these minor characters at a glance, inhabits them unexpectedly and intensely, but then lets them and its own gaze drift elsewhere without any of the usual formalities.

With no more signaling than Sister Ecclesia, Firbank's narration *flexibly withdraws . . .*

Notes

1. Miriam J. Benkovitz, *Ronald Firbank: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970), 114. Here she is drawing on Nancy Cunard's memoir, *Thoughts about Ronald Firbank*, which was then unpublished.

2. Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2011); and *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1994), 553. Bloom also admired Firbank's novels as great "nonsense literature," which, "at its finest, frees us from ordinary nonsense by taking us into a realm at once weirdly light and ultimately unsettling"; *How to Read and Why* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 225.

3. Steven Moore, *Ronald Firbank: An Annotated Bibliography of Secondary Materials, 1905-1995* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1996), vii.

4. Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 354–64.

5. Brigid Brophy, *Prancing Novelist: A Defense of Fiction in the Form of a Critical Biography in Praise of Ronald Firbank* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

6. Kevin Ohi, "Extreme Style: Firbank, Faulkner, and Perspectives on Modern Traditions," in *Leo Bersani: Queer Theory and Beyond*, ed. Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 2014), 250. For a further elaboration on these queer and paradoxical "dead ends" in the literary tradition, see Kevin Ohi, *Dead Letters Sent: Queer Literary Transmission* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2015).

7. Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 161.

8. Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the* Fin de Siècle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 191, 193.

9. Benkovitz, *Ronald Firbank*, 120.

10. Brophy, *Prancing Novelist*, 160.

11. Ronald Firbank, quoted in Ifan Kyrle Fletcher, *Ronald Firbank: A Memoir* (London: Duckworth, 1930), 73.

12. Peter A. Bailey, "Ronald Firbank and the Possibility of a West Indian Decadence," unpublished conference presentation, "Cosmopolitanism, Aestheticism, and Decadence, 1860–1920," University of Oxford, 17–18 June 2014.

13. Christopher Lane, "Re/Orientations: Firbank's 'Anglophobia' and the Sexual Nomad," in *The Ruling Passion: British Colonial Allegory and the Paradox of Homosexual Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995), 176–92.

14. Ronald Firbank, *Prancing Nigger* (1924, published in London as *Sorrow in Sunlight*), in *Five Novels* (New York: New Directions, 1961); all quotations from this novel are from pp. 128–29. All references to Firbank's novels are cited from this edition.

15. Jacques Derrida, "My Chances / *Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies," in *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984), 7.

16. J. Hillis Miller, "Derrida's *Destinerrance*," *MLN* 121 (2006): 905.

17. Ronald Firbank, *The Artificial Princess* (1915, published posthumously in 1934), in *Five Novels*, 284.

18. Paul Bourget, "Charles Baudelaire" (1881), in *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine*, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon, 1887), 20; translation mine.

19. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), 18–19.

20. Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, 19.

21. All references from *The Flower Beneath the Foot* (1923) are quoted from chap. 11 in *Five Novels*, 64–70.

22. Ronald Firbank, *Valmouth* (1919), in *Five Novels*, 189. All further references to this novel are quoted from pp. 189–93.

6 Burning the Candle at Both Ends

Edna St. Vincent Millay's Decadence

Sarah Parker

My candle burns at both ends;
    It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
    It gives a lovely light!

Edna St. Vincent Millay, "First Fig" (1918)

Walter Pater's hard gem-like flame became the image that defined late nineteenth-century decadence. But in the early twentieth century, another flame was to light the way for modern writers. This was Edna St. Vincent Millay's doubly burning candle—a beacon for the Greenwich Village bohemians of the 1920s, who can be seen as the descendants of the aesthetes of the 1890s. For many, Millay symbolized this new decadence: a beautiful, red-haired poet whose finely crafted lyrics appeared to document her various love affairs and liaisons. Millay captured the mood of a generation; as the *Woman Citizen* wrote, for "those of the war generation and younger—she needed no introduction."[1] For John Ciardi, her poems "invented a decade."[2] Millay's public persona combined decadent beauty with modern sophistication, leading her to become an iconic figure. Rapturous physical descriptions recur in reviews of her live readings. These frequently align her with decadence: a 1925 review states, "Miss Millay is flower-like—a tiny, slender, Bunthorne lily," alluding to Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* (used to promote Oscar Wilde's 1882 lecture tour of the United States). Meanwhile, a profile in the *New Yorker* described her as having "a throat that Rossetti would have loved," portraying Millay as a belated Pre-Raphaelite muse.[3]

If Millay's looks were seen as a throwback, the attitudes suggested by her poetry were strikingly modern. As her biographer Nancy Milford notes, when Millay published "First Fig" in *Poetry* in June 1918, "her cheeky quatrain ig-

nited the imagination of a generation of American women: she gave them their rallying cry."[4] Through this brief candle, Millay proclaimed the sexual independence of the new woman—or modern girl—who smoked, drank, and grasped pleasure wherever she could find it. In an era already characterized by female liberation, Millay still stood out as daring for her supposed advocacy of "free love." As a 1923 article puts it, her "love lyrics indicate an unusual attitude towards love in a woman, at least. A teasing perversity, an extreme candor, and a willingness to take love as men are reputed to, to be fickle and to be off with the old love when the fervor is gone are their characteristics."[5] This attitude is seen in poems such as "I shall forget you presently, my dear," in which the speaker teasingly entreats her lover to "make the most of this, your little day, / Your little month, your little half a year, / Ere I forget, or die, or move away."[6] To readers who conflated Millay with the speaker of her poems, such lines read as shocking confessions of promiscuity. Indeed, such associations led the politician Newton D. Baker to refuse to introduce Millay at her 1924 Cleveland reading because in his view her verses "condoned immorality."[7]

But Millay's connection to decadence went beyond Greenwich Village bohemianism. In the first part of this essay, I argue that her writings show consistent traces of decadent influence, in terms of both form (e.g., brief lyrics, epigrammatic plays) and theme (e.g., death, ennui, homoerotic desire). In the second half, I will discuss Millay's most sustained decadent project, her 1936 translations of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, arguing that through these translations Millay reframes both masculine poetic tradition and modernism. In the past twenty years of critical work on the relationship between decadence and modernism, it has become commonplace to assert that female modernists had a different relationship to their decadent forebears than their male counterparts.[8] Millay has not been included within this list, partly because she eludes modernist categorization. As Suzanne Clark explains, Millay departed from the conventions of impersonality that characterize the most dominant brand of modernism; in her work "there is a constant obtrusive slippage about the position of the subject, a slippage which threatens to violate modernist conventions."[9] Millay sought to establish commonality with her public audiences, rather than alienating herself. The cultivation of a recognizable persona, whose emotions were (or at least appeared to be) publically shared, played a crucial role in forging this connection. But Millay's seeming self-display—what one reviewer calls her "preoccupation with her own emotions and flesh"—transgresses T. S. Eliot's

demand that the poet separate "the man who suffers and the mind which creates."[10] Another factor that disqualifies Millay from certain definitions of modernism is her preference for fixed poetic forms, rather than engaging in free verse experiments. Due to this, she has sometimes been viewed as an inherently conservative writer, a dutiful daughter who parrots patriarchal language in the hope of winning approval. Debra Fried, for example, describes her work as "retrograde schoolgirl exercises" compared to the work of H.D. and Marianne Moore.[11] In this chapter, I want to counter this by emphasizing the radical potential of Millay's play with voice and persona from *within* traditional forms. Through her reworking of decadent forms and themes—epitomized in her ventriloquism of Baudelaire—Millay presents us with an alternative to modernism: a modern poetics that honors decadent influence.

"Sweet Incense, Mounting in the Windless Night": Millay and Decadence

As a young woman, Millay encountered many of the same influences that shaped the decadent writers before her. She studied nineteenth-century poetry at Vassar, as well as French and ancient Greek.[12] Her extensive library at Steepletop (the farmhouse in upstate New York where she lived from 1925) reveals that she owned several volumes by French and British decadent writers, including Algernon Charles Swinburne, Théophile Gautier, Paul Verlaine, Renée Vivien, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Wilde himself. Her letters contain references to Wilde—for example, in 1916, she writes to Arthur Hooley about her romantic relationships with women at Vassar: "I had known, but I had not realized, until I came here, how greatly one girl's beauty & presence can disturb another's peace of mind,—still more, sometimes, her beauty & absence.—There are Anactorias here for any Sappho.—And I am glad . . . that I have never felt moved to say harsh & foolish things about an Ancient Greek philosopher or a modern English poet, whom the world has condemned & punished."[13] Millay had a number of love affairs with other girls while studying at Vassar, including a relationship with an older girl, Elaine Ralli. This letter suggests that Millay saw her sexuality in continuity with Wilde's, appealing to the same ancient Greek precedent that Wilde alluded to in his infamous trial. Millay's commitment to the concept of Platonic love lasted through her early days in Greenwich Village, and she continued to have love affairs with women during her open marriage to Eugen Boissevain.

Millay's diet of decadence influenced her work, in terms of both her fa-

vored forms—the sonnet, the short lyric, the epigram, the verse drama—and her primary themes: love, lust, death, the city space, and beauty itself. Millay's poetry touches on decadent reference points, including classical allusions to Selene and Endymion, Daphne and Apollo, and Persephone. Her "Spring" alludes to Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* and cultivates a tone of decadent melancholy:

> Not only under ground are the brains of men
> Eaten by maggots.
> Life in itself
> Is nothing,
> An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.
> It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
> April
> Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.[14]

As well as expressing decadent ennui, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser argues that the poem can be read alongside Eliot's *The Waste Land* ("April is the cruellest month"). "Spring" was first published in the modernist journal the *Chapbook* in July 1920; *The Waste Land* was published two years later. Millay's free verse poem, published in a magazine associated with avant-garde poetic movements, reveals that her relationship to literary modernism is more complex than we have been led to believe. Similarly, Eliot's 1914 draft of *The Waste Land* reveals its decadent influences more plainly.[15] Millay's affinities with Eliot at this early stage in her career demonstrate that, in Kaiser's words, "writers cannot simply be divided into opposing camps."[16] As I hope to show later in this essay, both Millay and Eliot grapple with the significance of decadence in the age of modernity, coming to different conclusions through their approach to Baudelaire.

In a review of *The Buck in the Snow* (1928), Maxim Newmark refers to Millay as a "female aesthete": "We can almost see the cold poetess determining a theory of art which shall compromise with nothing in order to fix a bit of beauty forever."[17] "Evening on Lesbos" (from this volume) features all the hallmarks of decadent verse—gemstones, incense, a nighttime setting, and evocative themes of (homo)eroticism, forbidden love, and loss:

> Twice having seen your shingled heads adorable
> Side by side, the onyx and the gold,
> I know that I have had what I could not hold.

Twice have I entered the room, not knowing she was here.
Two agate eyes, two eyes of malachite,
Twice have been turned upon me, hard and bright.
Whereby I know my loss.
    Oh, not restorable
Sweet incense, mounting in the windless night![18]

Although the title is reminiscent of Baudelaire and Swinburne, the lyric's attenuated form resembles Sappho's original fragments. Millay herself was seen as the new Sappho; for example, a review called her "the greatest woman lyricist since Sappho."[19] Millay's expressions of lesbian desire are referred to coyly by Newmark as "certain beautiful attachments" that strike a "minor key."[20] As he observes, these are often expressed in her elegies, such as "Interim," in which the speaker returns home newly bereft of their beloved, and "Memorial to D.C." (written for Dorothy Coleman, a fellow Vassar student who died in the flu epidemic of 1918). Newmark claims that "Interim" "comes nearest to the feminine 'Thyrsis' or 'In Memoriam' than any other long poem of a like nature ever written by a woman."[21] Millay's homoerotic elegies are thus linked back to the works of Arnold and Tennyson, but her glorying in decay also suggests the influence of late Victorian decadence:

Let them bury your big eyes
In the secret earth, securely,
Your thin fingers, and your fair,
Soft, indefinite-colored hair,—
All of these in some way, surely,
From the secret earth shall rise;
Not for these I sit and stare,
Broken and bereft completely;
Your young flesh that sat so neatly
On your little bones will sweetly
Blossom in the air.[22]

This poem ("Elegy," 1921) strikes a similar note to Djuna Barnes's poems about beloved dead women, such as "The Flowering Corpse" (1923):

Over the body and the quiet head
Like stately ferns above an austere tomb,
Soft hairs blow; and beneath her armpits bloom
The drowsy passion flowers of the dead.[23]

Deborah Tyler-Bennett reads this as a rewriting of the undead Gothic maidens of Pre-Raphaelite mythology (Elizabeth Siddal with her ever-growing red hair) and the revenants of Edgar Allan Poe.[24] Like Barnes, Millay reworked decadent and gothic tropes when commemorating a dead beloved, lending her corpses a curious vitality—as well as drawing on mid-nineteenth-century elegiac tradition.[25]

A 1924 review by none other than Arthur Symons praised the decadence of Millay's work. Symons declared that "some of her verse reminds me of Poe's when he is most fantastically inhuman . . . here is an overconscious artist doing strange things with strange materials."[26] Symons drew particular attention to "The Poet and His Book," in which a poet begs to be read after death. Once again, Millay's vision of life beyond the grave is disturbingly vivacious:

> When these veins are weeds,
> When these hollowed sockets
> Watch the rooty seeds
> Bursting down like rockets,
> And surmise the spring again,
> Or, remote in that black cupboard,
> Watch the pink worms writhing upward
> At the smell of rain.[27]

Symons also singles out Millay's "The Singing Woman from the Wood's Edge" as a distinctly decadent poem. This dramatic monologue is spoken by a hybrid woman whose father is a devout man of the cloth and her mother a diabolic leprechaun:

> And who should be my playmates but the adder and the frog,
> That was got beneath a furze-bush and born in a bog?
> And what should be my singing, that was christened at an altar.
> But Aves and Credors and Psalms out of the Psalter?
> . . . . . .
> But there comes to birth no common spawn
> From the love of a priest for a leprechaun,
> And you never have seen and you never will see
> Such things as the things that swaddled me![28]

Symons suggests that this poem, with its reference to Irish folklore, might be inspired by Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* (1893). Linking to his theory of

decadence as "a new and beautiful and interesting disease," Symons argues that "one must have a depraved and abnormal imagination to have written such verses as these. I might almost imagine myself with Huysmans in Paris in 1892, when he was writing 'La-Bas.'"[29] Symons also praises a story by Millay, "The Murder in the Fishing Cat" (published in the *Century Magazine* in March 1923), in which a restaurateur, Jean-Pierre, inflicts his rage at an adulterous wife onto the only living creature left in his restaurant, an eel that he affectionately names "Phillipe." Jean-Pierre's attachment to Phillipe culminates in kitchen butchery, as he cooks and fries the eel for a solitary customer, believing that by doing so he is murdering his wife and her lover. Symons compares the story (which maintains the ambiguity as to whether Jean-Pierre really is a murderer) to an "opium-dream" and detects the influence of Poe and Villiers de l'Isle Adam.[30] While Symons exaggerates the decadence of Millay's work, viewing it through the lens of his own preoccupations, he correctly identifies the dark humor that frequently emerges in her prose works. In her sketches written in the persona of "Nancy Boyd," for instance, Millay's "talent for the epigram and her affinity with Oscar Wilde are especially evident."[31] For example, in "Knock-Wood," one of Millay's speakers declares, "Half-truths are all we have today. . . . We live by them. And we live for them. Though of course we would not die for them. All the martyrs were martyred years and years ago."[32] Millay's play *Aria da Capo* (1920) also displays a flair for Wildean absurdities, demonstrated by the opening scene, which takes place at a dining table:

> COLUMBINE: Pierrot, a macaroon! I cannot live without a macaroon!
>
> PIERROT: My only love, You are so intense! . . . Is it Tuesday, Columbine?—I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.[33]

This "Harlequinade," performed by the Provincetown Players (of whom Millay, also an actress, was a member), was designed to demonstrate the absurdity of war, through the murderous disagreement of the innocent shepherds Corydon and Thyrsis. At the end of the play, Pierrot and Columbine repeat the opening scene, the only difference being that the two dine extravagantly as the corpses of the shepherds lie beneath the table. In Millay's explanatory notes, Pierrot is conceived as a decadent figure: "Pierrot sees clearly into existing evils and is rendered gaily cynical by them; he is both too indolent and too indifferent to do anything about it."[34] Pierrot voices Wildean paradoxes, such as, "You see I am always wanting / A little more than I have,—or else / A little less." Like Wilde's dandies, Pierrot emphasizes

his excessive appetite, declaring, "Food is my only lust." Meanwhile, Columbine delivers lines of decadent insouciance: "I am getting tired of caviar / And peacock's livers. Isn't there something else / That people eat?"[35] A stock character originating in Commedia dell'Arte, Pierrot is a persistent presence in both decadent and modernist works (by writers as diverse as Ernest Dowson, Olive Custance, Aubrey Beardsley, Wallace Stevens, William Faulkner, and Edith Sitwell). A "sad clown," Pierrot represents a paradox of sorrow within gaiety, while also standing in for the figure of the artist, alienated within society.[36] Pierrot is therefore a wholly appropriate figure to critique decadent nihilism in the face of approaching war; his indifference channels Millay's outrage at the absurdity of war.

But Millay's *most* decadent moment came in 1936, when she published a translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, in collaboration with her lover George Dillon. This project, crucially, enables Millay to confront not only masculine poetic tradition—by ventriloquizing a male poet who fantasizes violence against women—but modernism too. By the time of her embarking on this project, Baudelaire had been firmly co-opted by modernist writers as representing the "new." Eliot wrote in 1930 that Baudelaire is "the greatest exemplar in modern poetry in any language, for his verse and language is the nearest thing to a complete renovation that we have experienced."[37] But Baudelaire remained a contentious figure, caught between decadence and modernism. Reading Baudelaire through Millay, and Millay through Baudelaire, enables us to recognize that a narrowly defined "modernism" is only one manifestation of the complex relationship between nineteenth-century decadence and twentieth-century literary culture.

Translating with the Lights On: Millay and Baudelaire

Before embarking on a discussion of Millay's translation of Baudelaire, it is necessary to contextualize her project in relation to previous translations of *Les Fleurs du mal.* Although Swinburne's 1862 review in the *Spectator* promoted Baudelaire in Britain, it was not until the fin de siècle that Baudelaire's work appeared in a substantial English translation. This was *Some Translations from Charles Baudelaire, Poet and Symbolist* (1894) by "H. C."—usually identified as Henry Curwen.[38] At the same time, decadent poets such as John Gray, Lord Alfred Douglas, and Vincent O'Sullivan tried their hand at translating individual or clusters of Baudelaire's poems. In 1906, Frank Pearce Sturm, friend of W. B. Yeats and Thomas Sturge Moore, published *The Poems of Charles Baudelaire*—an effective translation, but, like "H. C." before him,

he avoided the more scandalous poems. Sturm's preface, however, observed that Baudelaire found inspiration in "the refined and tortured body of modern times," and in this sense his analysis promoted Baudelaire as "a crucial precursor to Modernism."[39]

It was Arthur Symons's 1925 translation that came to be considered "the official representative of Baudelaire in English," although most scholars of Baudelaire consider it a poor translation.[40] In a 1927 review, Eliot wrote that in Symons's translations "Baudelaire becomes a poet of the nineties—and not a good one at that."[41] For Eliot, Baudelaire was to be rescued from fin-de-siècle decadence and rehabilitated as a key inspiration for modernist poets. He praised John Middleton Murry's essay "Baudelaire and Decadence" (*TLS*, 1921), which emphatically detached Baudelaire from the works of Swinburne and Wilde, claiming that the poetry of the English fin de siècle "derive[s] from sources very different to that of Baudelaire. . . . The mere idea of Wilde understanding Baudelaire . . . is something ludicrous."[42] Eliot himself published several essays on Baudelaire, including "The Lesson of Baudelaire" (*The Tyro*, Spring 1921), "Poet and Saint" (*Dial*, 1927), "Baudelaire in Our Time" (*On Lancelot Andrewes*, 1928), and "Baudelaire" (*Selected Essays*, 1930). In the last of these, Eliot took pains to wrestle Baudelaire away from his late Victorian followers and establish him as a poet of modernity:

> There are, I think, special reasons for the difficulty in estimating his worth and finding his place. For one thing, Baudelaire was in some ways far in advance of the point of view of his own time, and yet was very much of it, very largely partook of its limited merits, faults, and fashions. For another thing, he had a great part in forming a generation of poets after him; and in England he had what is in a way the misfortune to be first and extravagantly advertised by Swinburne, and taken up by the followers of Swinburne. . . . To detach him from the associations of those English poets who first admired him, is no small task.[43]

Nonetheless, Eliot attempts the task and, rejecting Baudelaire's "stock of images" (including the prostitutes, serpents, cats, and corpses), claims him as a poet of the city and modernity, in terms that echo Pound's principles for imagism: "[Baudelaire] gave new possibilities to poetry in a new stock of imagery of contemporary life. . . . This introduces something new, and something universal in modern life. . . . It is not merely in the use of imagery of common life, not merely in the use of imagery of the sordid life of a great metropolis, but in the elevation of such imagery to the first intensity—presenting it as it is, and yet making it represent something much more than

itself—that Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other men."[44] As critics such as R. Galand and Patricia Clements have shown, Eliot incorporated Baudelaire's imagery into his own work, most notably *The Waste Land*, borrowing his lines and shaping them "to fit his own purpose."[45] Although he acknowledged Baudelaire's influence through his essays and annotations, Eliot's appropriation also involved "a remarkable act of dissociation" since "Eliot modernized himself . . . on nineteenth-century models" yet tended to repudiate this influence, conceal it, or—in the case of Baudelaire—use his criticism to recast his model in his own image.[46] Both Galand and Clements observe that Eliot's critical engagement with Baudelaire is intensely personal; for example, he portrays Baudelaire as ultimately a Christian moralist. Hypocritically, given Eliot's strictures about the dissociation of personality, "we learn perhaps as much about Eliot himself as about Baudelaire from his criticism of the French poet."[47]

The battle over Baudelaire—whether he was to be considered a fin-de-siècle idol or the father of modernism—was therefore still raging by the 1930s. Despite all the efforts of modernists, Baudelaire's reputation as a decadent was still going strong. Consider, for example, Caterina Bower Alcock's translations of *Flowers of Evil* (1929), accompanied by Beardsleyesque illustrations by her husband Beresford Egan. In her preface, Bower Alcock firmly places Baudelaire in the decadent tradition, claiming that "Baudelaire was not so much a decadent as the crystal essence of decadence."[48] Baudelaire clearly still had a significant role to play in the afterlives of decadence. Into this contentious field stepped Millay, neither a decadent nor a modernist poet, but an American formalist and an avowed feminist. Through her translations of Baudelaire, she implicitly took on modernism, translating the ultimate poet of modernity in her own distinctive way by imbuing his work with a modern, American tone. But this does not mean that Millay was unable to escape the personal; in fact, she was adept at performing a variety of voices in her work. Elizabeth Perlmutter describes this "hybridized diction": "Millay's style was a resplendent pastiche of Sapphic simplicity, Catullan urbanity, homeless Chaucerian idiom, uprooted Shakespearean grammar, Cavalier sparkle, Wordsworthian magnanimity, Keatsian sensuousness, and Housemanian melancholy, not of course compounded all at once in a single lethal draught, but lightly dispersed here and there throughout her songs and sonnets."[49] And as Marilyn May Lombardi notes, despite her reputation as a "personal" writer, from "her earliest poetry, we find that Millay continually tested the limits of her sympathy," pushing her boundaries and

experimenting with voices and situations that were strikingly different from her own.[50]

Indeed, *Flowers of Evil* was polyvocal from the start, as Millay did not embark on this translation project alone. In 1928, Millay began an affair with a younger male poet, George Dillon. In the summer of 1934, Dillon had begun translating poems from *Les Fleurs du mal*, but a year later he was struggling to complete the work. With the blessing of Millay's husband, Dillon came to stay at Steepletop, and they began to work on the translations together. In the preface to their 1936 *Flowers of Evil*, Millay sets the scene for this unintended collaboration: "About four months ago, when looking up a poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, in order to compare the original with Mr. Dillon's English version of it, my attention was caught by a line in quite another poem; a few minutes later, with something of the terror which a person must feel who realises that he has undoubtedly been bitten by a mosquito and he is in a notoriously malarial climate, I found *that I had translated the line*!"[51] Having been bitten by the bug, Millay describes "the sickening conviction that I was in for it, that I had caught the fever, that neither quinine nor wise counsel could save me."[52] She ends up contributing to the translations; of the final seventy-two poems in the volume, thirty-six are by Millay, thirty-five are by Dillon, and one is a collaboration. Lombardi describes how Millay's preface adapts "Baudelaire's erotic tropes to describe her own enterprise as a consumer and transmuter of texts," in the process staging "a psychosexual encounter with the most influential poet of modernity."[53] However, within this sadomasochistic setup, Millay is not the vampire's victim—she becomes the vampire herself. Stating that translation is "as complicated as blood transfusion," Millay argues that the translator "must be able to fill the veins of the poem, nearly emptied through the wound inflicted by translation, with his own blood, and make the poem breathe again."[54] Millay takes Baudelaire, the heroic father of modernism, and drains his blood, replacing it with her own. In this vision, she performs the role of the "female succuba that haunted Baudelaire's *fin-de-siècle* culture."[55] She also occupies the role that modernists might regard as rightfully theirs—reanimating Baudelaire for a twentieth-century audience and ventriloquizing his voice.

Millay was one of the first female translators of *Les Fleurs du mal* into English.[56] Lombardi sees Millay as bringing a feminist awareness to her translations, softening Baudelaire's portrayals of violence against women: "As a woman, Millay could not comfortably adopt a Baudelairean approach towards her subject matter. . . . If a woman writer were to fall in line with such

an aesthetic, she would be forced to violate her own person."[57] However, Millay's preface in fact emphasizes the importance of a translator who is neither shocked nor disturbed by the content of the verse. As she observes, previous translators have been "at times rather uncomfortable under their self-shouldered pack. One sees them at moments ill at ease and embarrassed in the face of a scandalous or otherwise disturbing line, and at those moments the unforgivable thing is bound to happen: they gloss him over; they tone him down; they pass him off. They translate him with the lights out." Millay argues that admiration of a poet's form and style will not get you very far if you are not in sympathy with their temperament and subject matter: "To be attracted by the music of a poem, to admire it as a fine piece of observation . . . all these honest approbations will not avail, will not lift a finger to save, in his difficult task, the translator nagged by the consideration that the work upon which he is engaged is not 'strictly moral.'"[58] Millay implies that it is she—the shameless chronicler of the exploits of the modern woman—who is the ideal mouthpiece for Baudelaire; she'll embrace his corpus with the lights *on*. Throughout the preface, Millay takes pains to show that she is not shocked by his verse—for example, she breezily dismisses the eroticization of the wound as "a fairly conventional sex perversion."[59]

Carol Clark and Robert Sykes argue that Millay's ambition to confront Baudelaire head-on is fulfilled by her translating some of his "most shocking poems," those often avoided by previous translators.[60] For example, "Une Martyre" ("Murdered Woman" in Millay's version) describes the body of a decapitated woman in strikingly eroticized terms:

> The headless trunk, in shameless posture on the bed,
> Naked, in loose abandon lies,
> Its secret parts exposed, its treasures all outspread
> As if to charm a lover's eyes.
>
> One sequined stocking, pink against the milky thigh,
> Remains, pathetic souvenir;
> The jeweled garter, like a flashing, secret eye,
> Darts and withdraws a diamond leer.[61]

In order to support her thesis that, as a woman, Millay must translate Baudelaire differently to avoid enacting symbolic violence on her own person, Lombardi argues that Millay emphasizes the vulnerability and exposure of the dead woman. But in my view, it is precisely the fact that Millay does *not*

soften the violent sexuality of Baudelaire's poems that makes this a radical translation project. Millay makes it clear in her preface that she does not view Baudelaire as monstrous, dangerous, or depraved. Since her and Dillon's volume is selective, she could have avoided the more violent poems. The fact is that Millay was well practiced in "violating her own person"—and seemed rather to enjoy it. A number of her own poems fantasize about wounding and being wounded; for example, the second sonnet of *Fatal Interview*, her sequence inspired by Dillon, imagines love as "this beast that rends me in the sight of all," leaving the speaker with the "scar of this encounter."[62] We can also see this in her unpublished self-portrait poem, composed as part of a game with John Peale Bishop and Edmund Wilson in the spring of 1920. Millay praised her own body in blazon-like parts, concluding with

> A large mouth,
> Lascivious,
> Aceticized by blasphemies.
> A long throat,
> Which will someday
> Be strangled.[63]

As Cheryl Walker notes, there is something "clinical about Millay's description, as though her body were part of a department store inventory."[64] She dismembers herself in order to appraise her various parts, participating in the male poetic tradition of the blazon, just as she enthusiastically participates in the violent fantasies of Baudelaire. In doing so, Millay takes on the roles of both slasher and slashed, dismemberer and dismembered. This duality echoes the hysterical behavior that Sigmund Freud observed in a bisexual woman in his essay "Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks" (1909). Freud describes a patient who "pressed her dress to her body with one hand (as the woman) and trying to tear it off with the other (as the man)."[65] In a related way, Millay enacts the violation of her own body. However, it is important to note that this violation is performed with a heavy dose of irony. As Catherine Cucinella argues, "Millay's ability to out-fetishize male fetishism with her poetic representations of the body puts into question masculinity itself."[66] Through ventriloquizing male poetic tradition, Millay exposes these conventions as rather hollow gestures. In doing so, Millay emphasizes gender as merely a matter of poetic performance.

If exposure and violation are matters of poetic convention that could be

voiced by a woman, then male poetic bodies have the potential to be exposed, dismembered, and violated too. As we have seen in Millay's preface, Baudelaire himself is imagined as wounded. He is thus feminized, and, in a gender reversal, Millay infuses him with *her* venom. This gender reversal is not reserved for Baudelaire. Just as Millay imagines herself consuming Baudelaire, she also threatened to engulf Dillon himself. While the project began as *his* venture, Millay almost subsumed him, especially when her name was printed above his on the original cover. She objected to this and made sure that Dillon's name was given priority—but even in this tussle with the publishers, hers is still the voice of authority, speaking on Dillon's behalf.[67] Dillon's feminization (augmented by his youth and his position as a less well-known poet) is also seen in *Fatal Interview*, in which the male beloved is depicted as Endymion, prone and sleeping, on which the speaker (identified with the moon goddess Selene) can feast her eyes: "Oh, sleep forever in the Latmian cave, / Mortal Endymion, darling of the Moon!"[68] As Patricia A. Klemans observes, in these sonnets "Millay reversed the masculine-feminine traditional stances while working within the traditional forms."[69] Dillon becomes the object of the gaze, the role usually reserved for the female muse. Dillon's fate also echoes that of other female muses. *The Flowers of Evil* was his biggest success—he did not publish another volume of his own poetry—and he is primarily remembered today as Millay's lover.[70]

Millay's cross-gendered ventriloquism recalls Baudelaire's own "Lesbos" and "Femmes Damneés" and Swinburne's "Anactoria." Both poets found inspiration in Sappho's dismembered corpus, ventriloquizing her voice to construct their own versions of lesbian sadomasochism, in which lesbian bodies are endlessly dismembered and remembered. Through her translations, Millay responds to Baudelaire's ventriloquism of Sappho's fragmented corpus by ventriloquizing and dismembering *him*. Sappho's work itself offers a model of fragmentation that breaks down subject/object binaries. For example, in Fragment 31, it is the speaker/subject that dissolves, on gazing at the beloved: "my tongue is snapped, at once a subtle fire has stolen beneath my flesh, I see nothing with my eyes, my ears hum, sweat pours from me, a trembling seizes me all over."[71] Millay, who was clearly an attentive reader of Sappho, frequently constructs speakers who are simultaneously breaking and broken.

But despite her unflinching translations of some of Baudelaire's most violent and misogynistic poems, some reviewers regarded Millay's translations as too feminine. Mary Colum in the *Saturday Review* claimed, "The reason

that she does not achieve a closer approach to an acceptable rendering is partly because she is a woman."[72] R. P. Harris agrees that while Dillon can approach the mind of Baudelaire, Millay cannot. As an example, he discusses her translation of "L'Avertisseur" (Millay's "The Fang," though others translate this literally as "The Warner"):

> No man that's worthy of the name
> But in his helpless heart alive
> Harbors a yellow, talkative
> Serpent, he cannot hush nor tame.
>
> Gaze if you like into the eyes
> Of dryads. . . . Just before you drown,
> The Fang says, "You've a date in town."[73]

Harris complains, "This [second] stanza is flip; it seems cheap; an impertinence to a poet who was absolutely incapable of thinking in such an essentially womanish mold."[74] While there does not seem much "essentially womanish" about Millay's rendering, Harris is correct that Millay imbues her translation with her own distinctive tone; its flippancy echoes the poems of *Figs*, with their light, modern touch and flirtatious humor. Other translations of "L'Avertisseur" have the serpent say "duty, not delight!" and "Think of your duty!"[75] When Millay's serpent declares "You've a date in town," she updates this nagging sense of responsibility to the modern world (commuting, meetings, dates) and the urban space. Rather than a drama of duty, this is the mundane modern world encroaching on the subject's romantic reverie.

Millay thus adapts the tone of Baudelaire's poems to suit her own poetic style. Indeed, Clark and Sykes observe that "Millay's detached, ironic persona succeeds in inhabiting some of Baudelaire's more reflective and nostalgic poems," imbuing them with a "distinctly female and very American character."[76] In her preface, Millay presents herself as the heir to Baudelaire by relocating him from nineteenth-century Paris to twentieth-century New York: "Charles Baudelaire was a true Parisian, a poet of the city, a confirmed city-dweller. . . . The New York skyline, with the tremendous Empire State Building, with the sequined Chrysler tower silver in the sunlight, with the windows suddenly blazing like yellow sapphires in a million windows, above the outrageous, whirling, dining and conniving town—New York as a spectacle would have delighted him."[77] Millay thus transfers Baudelaire to *her* territory—the city whose sights and sounds she chronicled in poems such

as "Macdougal Street" (1921), where the female flaneur traverses a busy street in Greenwich Village. Millay notes that Baudelaire's love for the city is particularly captured in "Rêve Parisien." Her translation, "Parisian Dream," is equally haunted by New York: "the great / Intoxicating monotone / Of marble, water, steel and slate."[78] Millay subtly specifies the word "steel" (Baudelaire's original is simply "metal"), the material of New York's most iconic skyscrapers (such as the Chrysler Building, completed six years before the publication of this poem). By claiming Baudelaire as her own, Millay shows that the poet of modernity does not have to be a modern*ist* poet—or a male poet. Yesterday's nineteenth-century male flaneur is the twentieth-century's daring girl about town.

We can also detect similar shifts in poetic tone in "Ever So Far from Here," in which Millay transforms Baudelaire's evocative tercets into comically blunt rhymes that puncture the erotic atmosphere:

> This is the house, the sacred box,
> Where, always draped in languorous frocks,
> And always at home if someone knocks,
>
> One elbow into the pillow pressed,
> She lies, and lazily fans her breast,
> While fountains weep their soulfullest.[79]

Notice how "case sacreé" in Baudelaire's poem becomes "sacred box"—both humorously banal and also implying that the inhabitant Dorothy is as closely imprisoned as in a coffin. Following "languorous," the short vowel in "frocks" sounds even harder, the blunt end rhymes undermining the serene atmosphere. In the second stanza, the end rhymes become more soft and sibilant (perhaps in homage to Baudelaire's original end rhymes for this stanza: seins/cousins/bassins). However, by concluding the stanza on the awkwardly forced rhyme "soulfullest," Millay pokes fun at the pretentions of the posturing Dorothy and the studiedly languid atmosphere. Her translation revels in the artificiality of this scene, asking the reader directly, "Was ever so spoiled a harlot known?"[80] But Dorothy is in on the joke; the poem emphasizes the posturing required of femininity, in which the woman is complicit.

In her preface, Millay admits that her poems are versions, not word-for-word translations: "some of the translations in this book are so free as to be more properly speaking adaptations than translations." She identifies her version of "La Lune Offensée" as "an extreme example of free translation."[81]

In "The Outraged Moon" she omits entirely the reference to "ton domino jaune, et d'un pied clandestine" in the third stanza, replacing it with the following:

> Or, shall we say, 'tis your old flame Endymion
> Whose superannuated charms you gaze upon?
> Fancy your keeping up that faded rendezvous![82]

Millay claims that her alterations emphasize the "insolence of the poet to moon."[83] However, her version makes the tryst with Endymion more prominent, shifting it to the first line of the stanza. Once again, Millay uses contemporary-sounding idioms ("old flame," "fancy your") to update the poem. It is hard to resist reading this poem as partly autobiographical, given that Millay had previously praised Dillon as Endymion and that another poem of 1939 concerning their affair is entitled "Rendezvous" (ending with the sardonic line, "I wish I did not feel like your mother").[84] In "The Outraged Moon," then, I suggest that Millay indulges in self-mockery. Speaking as the insolent poet, she also observes herself as the amorous moon; again, she plays both roles and enjoys goading herself.

In 1961, Robert Lowell endeavored to add modern American tone to Baudelaire's verse in his *Imitations*, declaring, "I have tried hard to write live English and to do what my authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America."[85] But Millay had in fact beaten him to this attempt by twenty-five years.[86] These alterations were partly necessitated by Millay and Dillon's formal decisions. As Millay outlines in her preface, they attempted to recreate the French alexandrine as an English hexameter, in order to preserve the sound of the lines as much as possible. For this reason, the majority of their translations use iambic hexameter in an attempt to approximate French hexameter.[87] As Millay explains, "we often came much closer to what we wanted by importing into the twelve-syllable line . . . one or two (infrequently three) extra syllables, still always keeping the line, however, a line of six feet"—hence the additional words and images in their versions. Preserving Baudelaire's form was clearly as important to the translators as preserving his meaning, for as Millay observes, "to translate formal stanzas into free verse, free verse into rhymed couplets, is to fail the foreign poet."[88] Baudelaire himself favored traditional, fixed verse forms; the "dominant metre in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is twelve-syllable alexandrine, the defining metre of French versification" from the sixteenth century onward (as Millay notes, the English equivalent is iambic pentameter).[89] Baudelaire's distinc-

tion therefore lies in his combining of traditional forms with innovative subject matter. He experiments *within* traditional verse forms, pushing the boundaries of formal conventions but not breaking them. In a similar way, Millay's work combines fixed forms with groundbreaking subject matter. As Klemans argues, "A Millay poem looks traditional—in form it is. But her characterization of a woman who is initiator, aggressor, and controller as well as victim, sufferer, and survivor is unique."[90] Or, if not exactly unique, she was at least strikingly outspoken for the time in which she was writing. Millay repeatedly demonstrated that feminism could coexist with, and be expressed through, conventional formal constraints. Her poems remake such forms from the inside. Consider, for example, her sonnet "I will put Chaos into fourteen lines" (1954), which imagines Chaos as a male figure, bound within the "sweet order" of the form. The speaker is all-powerful, forcing him to submit to her control: "let him twist, and ape / . . . in pious rape, / I hold his essence and amorphous shape," concluding with quiet triumph: "I have him."[91] In this poem, Millay takes the sonnet—a form associated with masculine poetic tradition, especially praising the female beloved—and reworks it into a sadistic fantasy of female power and control that manipulates and disempowers a masculine force (particularly interesting given her earlier sonnets about Dillon). Millay also used the sonnet form to attack her poetic peers who considered "straightforwardness wrong, evasion right"—in a poem that may be intended as a veiled attack on Eliot and other modernists who favored obscurity and *vers libre*.[92]

Both Baudelaire and Millay therefore combined traditional forms with modern subject matter. Millay's translations were an attempt at formal innovation in order to capture the sound of his original verse. However, her venture was ultimately a failure because, as Jackson Mathews has observed, "in the history of English poetry the hexameter has been an eccentric line, whereas the alexandrine is the central 'heroic' line of French poetry, so that any translation into hexameter misses the traditionalist formal impulse that runs in counterpoint to Baudelaire's radical subject-matter."[93] Nonetheless, unlike Eliot, who incorporated Baudelaire's lines and images into free verse poems, Millay attempted to be true to Baudelaire's formal qualities, while also making him relevant to twentieth-century audiences in the tone of her poems. Rather than disguising the influence of the poetic past, Millay both honors it and transforms it from the inside. This translation project enabled Millay to experiment even more radically in her next poetic venture, *Con-*

versation at Midnight (1937), in which she continued to ventriloquize male voices in order to parody and critique contemporary masculinity.

"Letting the Verse Go Loose": *Conversation at Midnight*

Conversation at Midnight is perhaps Millay's most daring experiment with form. A verse drama with seven male characters (including a poet, a painter, a stockbroker, and a priest) set at a dinner party in contemporary New York, the poem incorporates a startling variety of poetic styles. This drama is touched by Baudelaire's presence in a number of ways. Millay had considered presenting Baudelaire's own story in dramatic form: the appendix of *Flowers of Evil* presents a list of "Dramatis Personae" for *Charles Baudelaire: A Tragedy*, with a cast including Manet, Gautier, and Flaubert. It may not be too far-fetched to imagine that this grouping inspired the dialogue *Conversation at Midnight*. The sexualized violence of the men's conversation suggests that Millay wished to scrutinize the legacy of misogyny she had encountered in Baudelaire. For example, Pygmalion, a bohemian writer of short stories, declares, "Women are poison and I prefer my poison straight . . . / The man who gets married expects / To sip up heaven; and in a year he's comatose."[94] *Conversation* is peppered with casual violence toward women, as when Merton, a stockbroker, exclaims (about his wife ruining a hunting trip), "God, I could have wrung / Her neck."[95] Along with issues of communism, religion, and pacifism, the cacophony of male voices in *Conversation* further defamiliarizes masculinity, a project Millay began in *Flowers of Evil*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the volume received mixed reviews. It was generally considered a striking departure from Millay's usual poetic mode, and critics found its confrontation of contemporary issues challenging, and rather too much of an encroachment on male territory. One reviewer commented wryly, "Miss Millay has either been behind the curtains at several of the more intellectual stag parties or she has a most observing informer."[96] Critics tend to regard it as Millay's most "modernist" work. For example, John Timmerman Newcomb argues that in "representing the rhythms of prolonged conversation as a disjoined collage of subject matter and shifting emotional nuance, she demonstrated how some central formal attributes of high modernism could be appropriated for a poetry based not on alienated individualism but on social dialogue."[97] In *New Masses*, Horace Gregory regarded it as a reaction *against* decadence, stating that the character of Pygmalion

"reminds me a little of the Carl Van Vechten–Donald Evans type," especially at the moment when he declares,

> The world stinks. It stinks like a dead cat under a door-step. It stinks to hell.
> Wherever I step I have to hold my nose, the world stinks so.
> I can't get to windward of the stink, there's not a breath of air
> Stirring, just a bit stink squatting under the hot sky.[98]

Gregory interprets this "as a sign of a New York liberal literary world gone rotten beyond the power of its own description" and that "the perfumed world of *Peter Whiffle* had turned from its forbidden (and adolescent) excesses."[99] Certainly it seems significant that the most decadent, hedonistic character is able to see most clearly the corruption of his times (rather like Pierrot in *Aria da Capo*). Perhaps this implies that decadence is a clear-eyed *reaction* to modernity, rather than its degenerate symptom? It is difficult to ascertain Millay's attitude, as within this multivocal dialogue no one perspective is prioritized. This is partly what makes the poem so challenging, especially for those who are used to reading Millay as "personal." Her erstwhile admirer Edmund Wilson was dismayed by the volume, particularly its formal innovations: "You see metrics in full dissolution. The stress is largely neglected; the lines run on for paragraphs; sometimes the rhymes fade out." He noted that symptoms of this metrical dissolution could be detected in Millay's translations of Baudelaire, in which she eschewed the opportunity to "render the ringing alexandrines of Baudelaire in English meters equally accurate and emphatic," instead "letting the verse go loose." All in all, he found her style chaotic, declaring that she had "gone to pieces."[100]

But as I hope to have shown in this essay, Millay consistently experimented with a variety of poetic styles throughout her career. From her earliest volumes, she incorporated elements of modernism and decadence but remained distinct from both. She engaged with decadence, but in a different way from that of her modernist peers, neither denying nor subsuming decadent influence, instead honoring it with a sense of irony and play. This is seen mostly clearly in *Flowers of Evil*, in which she adapts Baudelaire's forms and boldly translates some of his most controversial poems, but in the process also subtly imbues them with irony, dry humor, and a modern, American tone. Millay's complex response to decadent writers can and should be read alongside that of other twentieth-century writers—and not just modernists. Dorothy Parker, for example, cited her as an important influence, and a detailed analysis of both poets' engagements with decadence would

no doubt yield interesting results. Through examining Millay's legacy, we might also see more clearly the influence of Millay on later work by Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton.[101] Millay's poetry reveals alternative engagements with decadence; her work can be considered a conversation between modernist and decadent modes, in which both voices have a right to be heard.

Notes

1. E. B. K., "Edna St. Vincent Millay: The Woman of the Hour," *Woman Citizen*, Apr. 1927, 7.

2. John Ciardi, "Edna St. Vincent Millay: A Figure of Passionate Living" (Nov. 1950), in *Critical Essays on Edna St. Vincent Millay*, ed. William B. Thesing (New York: G. K. Hall, 1993), 158.

3. "Edna St. Vincent Millay Takes Bowdoin by Storm," *Lewiston Journal*, 6 May 1925, n.p.; Griffin Barry, "Vincent," *New Yorker*, 12 Feb. 1927, 26.

4. Nancy Milford, *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (New York: Random House, 2001), xiii.

5. Julia McCarthy, "Famous Love Lyricist Belies Her Own Philosophy by Marrying," *Boston Evening Newspaper*, 21 July 1923, 1.

6. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "I shall forget you presently" (*Figs*, 1922), in *Selected Poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay: An Annotated Edition*, ed. Timothy F. Jackson, intro. Holly Peppe (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2016), 57.

7. "Baker Refusal Shocks Poetess," *Boston Post*, 20 Mar. 1924, n.p.

8. See, e.g., Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); Len Gutkin, "Djuna Barnes's Nightwood and Decadent Style," *Literature Compass* 11, no. 6 (2014): 337–46; Sarah Parker, "Whose Muse? Sappho, Swinburne and Amy Lowell," in *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Stefano Evangelista (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2013), 193–212.

9. Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991), 68.

10. "The World of Poetry," *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 Dec. 1941, n.p.; T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919–20), in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. 2, 7th ed., ed. M. H. Abrams and S. Greenblatt (London: Norton, 1999), 2398.

11. Debra Fried, "Andromeda Unbound: Gender and Genre in Millay's Sonnets," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 32, no. 1 (1986): 1.

12. See Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, ed. Allan Ross Macdougall (Camden, ME: Down East Books, 1952), 48.

13. Millay to Hooley, Mar. 1916, quoted in Milford, *Savage Beauty*, 132. See Millay, *Letters*, for Millay's references to Swinburne (369) and Octave Mirabeau (89).

14. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Spring" (*Second April*, 1921), in *Selected Poems*, 25.

15. See Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 264–79.

16. Jo Ellen Kaiser, "Displaced Modernism: Millay and the Triumph of Sentimentality," in *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal*, ed. Diane P. Freedman (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1995), 28–29.

17. Maxim Newmark, "*The Buck in the Snow*: A Review," *Chapbook* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1928): 21.

18. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Evening on Lesbos" (*Buck*, 1928), in *Collected Poems*, ed. Norma Millay (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 239.

19. Sterling North, review of *Conversation at Midnight*, *Chicago Daily News*, 21 July 1937, n.p. Millay was clearly an attentive reader of Sappho: "Into the golden vessel of great song" (*Second April*, 1921), "Sappho Crosses the Dark River into Hades" (*Wine from These Grapes*, 1934), and "Of what importance, O my lovely girls, my dancers" (*Mine the Harvest*, 1954) all allude to Sappho. Millay's library contains five volumes of the *Greek Anthology*, and a huge bust of Sappho occupies the drawing room.

20. Newmark, "*Buck in the Snow*," 20. This phrase has interesting resonances with Amy Levy's work.

21. Newmark, "*Buck in the Snow*," 20. "Interim" was originally published with the epigraph "A Man Speaks," and the original draft reads "The Widower Speaks"; however, in a later version it is published without these epigraphs, lending a greater sense of gender ambiguity. See note in Millay, *Selected Poems*, 10.

22. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Elegy" (*Second April*, 1921), in *Selected Poems*, 40.

23. Djuna Barnes, "The Flowering Corpse," in *Djuna Barnes: Collected Poems, with Notes towards the Memoirs*, ed. Phillip Herring and Osías Stutman (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 2005), 91.

24. Deborah Tyler Bennett, "Thick within Our Hair: Djuna Barnes' Gothic Lovers," in *Gothic Modernisms*, ed. Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (London: Palgrave, 2001), 95–110. See also Sarah Parker, "Urban Economies and the Dead-Woman Muse in the Poetry of Amy Levy and Djuna Barnes," in *Economies of Desire at the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Libidinal Lives*, ed. Jane Ford, Kim Edwards Keates, and Patricia Pulham (London: Routledge, 2016), 83–105.

25. Millay was also an admirer of A. E. Housman; see Millay, *Letters*, 161, 163–64.

26. Arthur Symons, "Miss Millay's Kinship to Keats," in Thesing, *Critical Essays*, 129. Thesing's volume cites the publication of this article as 1942. However, it was in fact originally published in *New York World* on 6 May 1924.

27. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "The Poet and His Book" (*Second April*, 1921), in *Collected Poems*, 84.

28. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "The Singing Woman from the Wood's Edge" (*Figs*, 1922), in *Collected Poems*, 133.

29. Symons, "Miss Millay's Kinship," 130.

30. Symons, "Miss Millay's Kinship," 131.

31. Will Brantley, "The Force of Flippancy: Edna Millay's Satiric Sketches of the Early 1920s," *Colby Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1991): 142.

32. Nancy Boyd [Millay], *Distressing Dialogues* (New York: Harper, 1924), 188. These sketches were first published in *Vanity Fair*.

33. Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Aria da Capo: A Play in One Act* (New York: Harper, 1921), 5. Millay's verse drama *The Lamp and the Bell* (1921) is reminiscent of the works of Michael Field, with its Italian Renaissance setting and lesbian theme. The play was reviewed alongside Charlotte Mew's *Saturday Market* by John V. A. Weaver (*Brooklyn N.Y. Eagle*, 20 Aug. 1921).

34. Millay, *Aria da Capo*, 49.

35. Millay, *Aria da Capo*, 6–7, 11, 10.

36. See Robert F. Storey, *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978); and Martin Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell'Arte and the Modern Imagination* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993). For Millay's identification with Pierrot, see Sarah Parker, "Publicity, Celebrity, Fashion: Photographing Edna St. Vincent Millay," *Women's Studies* 45, no. 4 (2016): 399–400.

37. T. S. Eliot, "Baudelaire" (1930), in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), 388.

38. Carol Clark and Robert Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, ed. Carol Clark and Robert Sykes (London: Penguin, 1997), xxxi.

39. Quoted in Clark and Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xxxiv.

40. Jackson Mathews, "Baudelaire in English" (1949), quoted in Clark and Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xxxvii. Patricia Clements suggests that we should distinguish between Symons's earlier and later responses to Baudelaire: in his early responses Symons used Baudelaire to develop a sophisticated poetics of modernity, whereas in his later work Baudelaire becomes "a kind of patron devil"; *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1985), 190.

41. T. S. Eliot, "Poet and Saint" (*Dial*, 1927), quoted in Clark and Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xxxvii.

42. John Middleton Murry quoted in Clements, *Baudelaire*, 314.

43. Eliot, "Baudelaire," 381.

44. Eliot, "Baudelaire," 387–88.

45. R. Galand, "T. S. Eliot and the Impact of Baudelaire," *Yale French Studies* 6 (1950): 27.

46. Clements, *Baudelaire*, 333, 334.

47. Galand, "T. S. Eliot," 34.

48. Beresford Egan and C. Bower Alcock, *Baudelaire: Fleurs du Mal in Pattern and Prose* (London: Sophistocles Press, 1929), 7. For more information on their collabo-

ration in the context of post-Victorian decadence, see Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), 153–93.

49. Elizabeth P. Perlmutter, "A Doll's Heart: The Girl in the Poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Louise Bogan," *Twentieth Century Literature* 23, no. 2 (1977): 159.

50. Marilyn May Lombardi, "Vampirism and Translation: Millay, Baudelaire and the Erotics of Poetic Transfusion," in Freedman, *Millay at 100*, 136. For example, we see this in the aforementioned "Interim" about a grieving male widower.

51. Edna St. Vincent Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, by Charles Baudelaire, trans. George Dillon and Edna St. Vincent Millay (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), vi; italics in the original.

52. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, vi.

53. Lombardi, "Vampirism and Translation," 130.

54. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, xi, xiii.

55. Lombardi, "Vampirism and Translation," 133.

56. Bower Alcock is an important precursor, although her translations transform Baudelaire's poems into somewhat lurid prose. The fact that her volume was also a collaboration with her husband, Beresford Egan, also seems significant, in light of Millay's collaboration with Dillon. Other substantial translations of *Les Fleurs du mal* by women include those by Florence Louis Friedman (1962) and Joanna Richardson (1975).

57. Lombardi, "Vampirism and Translation," 134.

58. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, xiii.

59. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, xxiv.

60. Clark and Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xl.

61. Dillon and Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, 205.

62. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Sonnet II" (*Fatal Interview*, 1932), in *Selected Poems*, 127. See also "Here is a wound that never will heal, I know" (*Harp-Weaver*, 1923); "Life, were thy pains as are the pains of hell" (*Buck*, 1928); and "Leap now into this quiet grave" (*Huntsman*, 1939).

63. Quoted in Millay, *Letters*, 99–100.

64. Cheryl Walker, *Masks Outrageous and Austere: Culture, Psyche, and Persona in Modern Women Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991), 139.

65. Sigmund Freud, "Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks" (1909), in *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9, ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 230. Susan McCabe relates this to the editorial practice of the modernist poet H.D. in *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 144.

66. Catherine Cucinella, *Poetics of the Body: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elizabeth Bishop, Marilyn Chin, and Marilyn Hacker* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 29.

67. Dillon was also not sent proofs for the volume. See Millay, *Letters*, 259–80.

68. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Sonnet LII" (*Fatal*, 1931), in *Selected Poems*, 136.

69. Patricia A. Klemans, "'Being Born a Woman': A New Look at Edna St. Vincent Millay," *Colby Quaterly* 15, no. 1 (1979): 17.

70. Clark and Sykes view Dillon's translations as weaker than Millay's, "lacking [her] metrical control"; introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xli.

71. Sappho, "Fragment 31," in *Greek Lyric I: Sappho and Alcaeus*, trans. David A. Campbell, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994), 79–81.

72. Mary M. Colum, "Baudelaire in English," *Saturday Review*, 4 Apr. 1936, 15.

73. Dillon and Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, 15.

74. R. P. Harris, "The Perilous Task of Translating Baudelaire," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 21 July 1936, 4.

75. The first is from Lewis Piaget Shanks (1931), and the second is from William Aggeler (1954); see https://fleursdumal.org/.

76. Clark and Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xli.

77. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, xxxi.

78. Dillon and Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, 53.

79. Dillon and Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, 107. The opening lines of Baudelaire's poem are "C'est ici la case sacrée / Où cette fille très parée, / Tranquille et toujours préparée" (106).

80. Dillon and Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, 107.

81. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, xxv.

82. Dillon and Millay, *Flowers of Evil*, 105.

83. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, xxv.

84. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Rendezvous" (*Huntsman*, 1939), in *Selected Poems*, 184.

85. Lowell quoted in Clark and Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xlvi.

86. Clark and Sykes also note that Millay had anticipated Lowell's project; see introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xlvi.

87. This attempt to mimic French verse was doomed to fail, for, as Rachel Killick observes, "where English metre, reflecting the strong marked stress patterns of English, relies primarily on beat, French metre, drawing on the more evenly distributed stress patterns of the Romance languages, is primarily based on syllabic count." "Baudelaire's Versification: Conservative or Radical?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, ed. Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 52.

88. Millay, preface to *Flowers of Evil*, xx, vii.

89. Killick, "Baudelaire's Versification," 52.

90. Klemans, "Being Born a Woman," 17–18.

91. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "I will put Chaos into fourteen lines" (*Mine the Harvest*, 1954), in *Selected Poems*, 221.

92. See Edna St. Vincent Millay, "It is the fashion now to wave aside" (*Harvest*,

1954), in *Selected Poems*, 219. In a letter to her publisher in June 1949, Millay explained that she had been writing "a satire in verse against T. S. Eliot," though it is unclear which two poems are referred to. See Millay, *Letters*, 353.

93. Mathews, "Baudelaire in English" (1949), quoted in Clark and Sykes, introduction to *Baudelaire in English*, xli.

94. Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Conversation at Midnight* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), 46.

95. Millay, *Conversation at Midnight*, 4. For more discussion of violence in the poem, see Susan Gilman, "'Poesies of Sophistry': Impersonation and Authority in Millay's *Conversation at Midnight*," in Freedman, *Millay at 100*, 182–97.

96. Groverman Blake, "Turning the Pages," *Cincinnati Times*, 12 Feb. 1938, 42.

97. John T. Newcomb, "The Woman as Political Poet: Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Mid-century Canon," *Criticism* 37, no. 2 (1995): 269.

98. Millay, *Conversation at Midnight*, 109.

99. Horace Gregory, "Edna St. Vincent Millay's 'Conversation,'" *New Masses*, 3 Aug. 1937, 24–25.

100. Edmund Wilson, "Give That Beat Again" (1937), in Thesing, *Critical Essays*, 81.

101. Rhonda S. Pettit briefly suggests a connection between Millay and Parker in their use of decadent techniques; *A Gendered Collision: Sentimentalism and Modernism in Dorothy Parker's Poetry and Fiction* (Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2000), 29. Artemis Michailidou has discussed the influence of Millay on Anne Sexton but does not explore the potentially fruitful connections between decadence and confessional poetics in the work of both; "Gender, Body, and Feminine Performance: Edna St. Vincent Millay's Impact on Anne Sexton," *Feminist Review* 78 (2004): 117–40.

7 Woolf and Joyce, Barnes and Beckett
The Legacy of Decadence in Major Modernist Novels

Vincent Sherry

The four novelists featured in this chapter belong, in pairs, to different points of time in the history of literary modernism. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce were born in the same year (indeed, within weeks of each other, in 1882), while Djuna Barnes (1892) and Samuel Beckett (1906) stand a half or even a full generation later. This dating is relevant to our understanding of their relation, as modernist pairs, to the legacy of nineteenth-century decadence, which, for both pairs, emerges as a strongly orienting force. Immersed in their early careers in the establishing circumstances and precedent conventions of decadence, Woolf and Joyce will live out but, ultimately, outlive that inheritance. That inheritance does not end with them, however, since, in later years, Beckett and Barnes live it forward in ways that represent an extension and refinement of its characteristic attitudes and practices. Taken together, these four authors provide a history in miniature of decadence as an evolving consciousness within modernist literature.

The importance of this story may be gauged in relation to its unlikelihood in one understanding, which, surprisingly or not, has proven to be long-lived in the history of modernist literary criticism. In this reckoning, in a strict if somewhat simplistic calculation, the eras and sensibilities of decadence and modernism stand at categorical odds. Here the presentiments attending the root sense of "decadence"—falling away, a general sense of decay and a stylization of that feeling of decline—converge in the 1890s, which, as the last decade of the last century before the last century of the millennium, works within a rather fierce logic of symbolic chronology to inscribe this idea of endings as the defining, final idea of a now-fading nineteenth century. Not that numbers amount to nothing: in one imaginative apprehension, the ideas of progress in the nineteenth century come due at that century's end, when the manifest failure of its promise underwrites the contrary ideas of decline

and loss. In the successive century, accordingly, the sense of a "next" injects a feeling of "new" to a now assignably "modern" age, where a stylization of this new feeling of modernity produces "modernism" as its own signal sensibility. Many complexities of critical intelligence are of course working within these several terms, but the presumptive understanding in a history of modernist literary criticism—ranging from the first third of the century in Edmund Wilson to the middle and later periods in Frank Kermode and Hugh Kenner, and still beyond[1]—has served the notion of an essential disconnection, ranging from indifference to antipathy, between the centuries and sensibilities of decadence and modernism.

Whether or not we accept "the long turn of the century" as a period more useful for negotiating the relation of decadence and modernism, it is manifestly true that 1900 proved to be a border more porous than the purists of chronological nominalism might maintain. If cultural time were imaged as a major river, after all, the Thames would hardly reverse itself at an arbitrarily concocted spot. But the symbolism of round-numbered years is not without imaginative and hence cultural and specifically literary power. As Kermode himself has pointed out, the turn of the century locates its own particular spot of cultural time, focusing anxieties and expectations equally about endings and beginnings.[2] In this way of thinking, "modernism" and "decadence" might be the names of reciprocating rather than resistant conditions. Opening each of these terms for a deeper look, then, may serve to deepen as well as broaden our understanding of the cultural-historical ground they do share.

And so, first, into the depths of each word: considering that an idea of "decline" within decadence already inscribes crisis as its nominal feeling, "modernism" discloses a comparable sense from its own verbal and cultural etymology. This sense derives from the Latin *modo*, which, at its root, conveys a radical sense indeed: not "modern," not "recent," not "current," not even "today" or "now," but "*just now*"—a moment, and a moment fraught. This Latin temporal adverb does not occur in Virgil, Horace, Cicero, or any of the poets of the republic or even mid-empire era. It comes into being in the late fifth or early sixth century, that is, in late-empire days. It appears as a temporal metric in the years in which classical culture is finally collapsing. It is at its own birthing a measure of time, and the representation of a sense of time, at once exciting and perilously indeterminate: a blink (and also a brink) of time, a precipitous instant, all in all, a crisis time, and a time in crisis. So too, with the vertical memory certain words may exert, it was registered with all those associations—present excitement as well as remembered

threat—in the first third of the twentieth century, in the years in which "modernism" was coming into use as a label for then contemporary practice.[3]

The convergent associations of "decadence" and "modernism" offer a focal point then for a widening prospect of cultural and specifically literary history, which, in this chapter, includes for each of those terms not a uniform or exclusionary meaning but a range of emotional zones and affective powers. In this understanding, the crises that decadence inscribes so powerfully may be relevant and then less relevant for separate reasons and in successive stages of individual modernist careers, as for Woolf and Joyce, while the consolidation of the sensibility of decadence within the evolving consciousness of modernism may allow subsequent authors, here Barnes and Beckett, to intensify as well as subtilize the demonstrations of this sensibility within some of their most important work.

Woolf and Joyce: Empires, Ends

Woolf's earliest novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), belongs at first sorting to the genre of the female bildungsroman. It tells the story of Rachel Vinrace, an intellectually curious but erratically educated young woman, whose *voyage*, according to the conventions of the novel of education and the adventure of this particular fiction, occurs in space as well as in time. Here the destination of that journey, a working determinant in the story, takes on an especially emblematic character. The tale ends at an end of empire, a condition that is perennial in the historical imaginary of decadence, where it provides an expressive metric of great or grand (or grandiose) things gone. This is a presentiment that Woolf fixes both temporally and spatially, symbolically and actually, working out of her own experience of contemporary political history most closely.

Writing the novel from 1908 to 1913, she situates its historical fiction in the feeling of a most particular microperiod: a post-Boer War, pre-Great War England. The failure of the imperial plan in South Africa offers a situation in miniature and a history in advance of the monumental losses in the Great War. In the longer *dureé* of British Imperium, this 1908–13 moment codes, if not a first, certainly a most urgent augury of impending ends. This presentiment is obliquely but acutely present in the imperial history Woolf retells as she prepares the landing site of the current journey. This is the long defunct colony in South America now known as Santa Marina: "Somewhere about the middle of the seventeenth century a single sloop watched its season and slipped out by night, bearing within it all that was left of the great

British colony, a few men, a few women, and perhaps a dozen dusky children. English history then denies all history of the place."[4] Having been left to the Spanish and (mainly) abandoned in turn by them, this Santa Marina represents an end-of-the-world desolation as the destiny of those two—twin—imperial histories and ideologies.

In Woolf's novel, the more distant history of disintegrating imperia shows as a loss of moral authority as well as strategic power in the current circumstances of the British Empire. This absence is manifest in ways little and large, subtle as well as striking. This loss of authority is obvious when the rationale for empire is roundly and emphatically farced by Woolf in the words of her character Clarissa Dalloway, speaking *en voyage*: "Being on this ship seems to make it so much more vivid—what it means to be English. One thinks of all we've done, and our navies, and the people in India and Africa, and how we've gone on century after century, sending out boys from little country villages—and of men like you, Dick," she enthuses to her husband, "and it makes one feel as if one couldn't bear *not* to be English!"[5] The end that this character portends in her comic travesty is indicated more subtly—allusively but still unmistakably—through repeated references to Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which, following the models of Enlightenment and then Victorian historiography, suggests the fateful parallels in the narratives of the Roman and British Empires.

Gibbon's volume is associated closely in the novel with its most devoted reader, who is the fervent admirer of its neoclassical prose, the Wilde-like litterateur St. John Alaric Hirst. Manifestly and extravagantly homosexual, Hirst queers the end-of-empire-days feeling and catches its sense of diminishment in the "half-man" caricature of queerness that he enacts. In conventional explanations, such aberration of character served as both symptom and cause of British decline. Hirst is probably modeled on Woolf's developing acquaintance with Lytton Strachey, whom she seems otherwise to have admired, but the novel demonstrates the force of the conventions attending and attitudinizing the sensibility of decadence as she casts Hirst's character, like Forster's Cecil Vyse in *Room with a View*, into the most stereotypical configurations of decadent queerness.

Hirst moves to a clear and indicative prominence, following the otherwise unexpected death of Rachel Vinrace, on the last pages of the novel, which provides last rites for itself as well as for her. Hirst presides over the funereal hush in signal style. In the midst of inadequate (seriocomic) rituals of grief, "St. John made no reply. He lay back in his chair, half-seeing the others, half-

hearing what they said. He was terribly tired. . . . All these voices sounded gratefully in St. John's ears as he lay half-asleep."[6] Thrice repeated, the quantitative adverb "half" suggests the sense of diminishment—half is not twice nothing, it is half of a whole, as in the "half-man" figure of decadent queerness—which it signals so frequently in the lexicon of literary decadence. It measures and signifies loss and decline. It fixes the emotional twilight of this time of diminuendo, this "terribly tired" time, in Hirst himself—in the figure most typically associated with the declining times of decadence.

In the conjunction of these several narrative and thematic lines—a novel of education, like imperial history, ending in death and decline—we can see one convergent center of imaginative attention in the novel. It comes into boldest focus through the presiding personage of Hirst. The archly queer manner of this character functions in the context of the novel's close (and closing down) in terms of the understandings of queered time that Lee Edelman models so provocatively in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Turning on the nonreproductive element in homosexuality in particular, Edelman proposes nothing less—or more—than a forsaking of futurity as the temporal signature of queerness.[7] The sensibility of decadence per se may not compel or even interest Edelman, but his formulas of queer temporality provide one understanding of the imaginative tense of decadence in the literary grammar of this story's ending. And where the erasure of the future reads like a parable of the place history has prepared—not prepared—for women, it is equally striking and additionally significant that Woolf gives over the last rites of that uneventful future to him. As an exemplar of decadent as well as queer temporality, Hirst configures the sense of possibility—for Woolf, obviously, the lack of possibility—in contemporary history most indicatively.

In other words, Hirst is working in a lexicon of imaginative symptomology, one in which we can read Woolf's own developing relation to the sensibility of decadence that he typifies. The relation is obviously angled and manifestly gendered. As an entitled man, Hirst can of course stylize his forsaking of a future when the past has been so plentiful for him. Privileged or semi-privileged as a young woman in the cultural class of young Bloomsbury, Woolf is not likely to find continuing interest in the end games of a literary and political history that has excluded her as a woman. Even while her immersion in the conventions and themes of decadence signals the density of its presence in the early age of modernism, she needs to turn in alternative directions in her emergent work. And so the end of this novel

of education may be marked as a turn in the story of Woolf's own formation as a novelist. The closing down of Rachel's future may be read, then, as Woolf's own ultimate refusal of the muse of decadence that attends her heroine's end. This sensibility will not be working any further with anything like the concerted force it exerts in her first novel.

This similarly, ultimately, applies to Joyce, but for different reasons, some of which account for a more extended period of connection to the ethics and poetics of decadence. These are the circumstances he records for 1904, in retrospect, in 1922, in *Ulysses*. Here, in the personage of Stephen Dedalus, he registers the extent of his preoccupation as a young writer with the manners and attitudes and practices of literary decadence. Some of this influence shows in what is probably the least remarked-upon (certainly the least remarkable) area of Joyce's oeuvre: his early poetry, which, in its pearled forms and vintage diction, provides his version of the burnished verbal surfaces of Dowson and Johnson and, in a more complex way, the early Yeats.

The twilight turns from amethyst
    To deep and deeper blue,
The lamp fills with a pale green glow
    The trees of the avenue.

The old piano plays an air,
    Sedate and slow and gay;
She bends upon the yellow keys,
    Her head inclines this way.

Shy thoughts and grave wide eyes and hands
    That wander as they list—
The twilight turns to darker blue
    With lights of amethyst.[8]

Twilight, darkening skies, the yellowing keys of an old piano, from which the sounds of the dying fall, the tempo of diminuendo, may be seen in colors as well as heard in imagination: the atmospheric prospects of these poems are awash in fading echoes and diminishing lights. These are the images and motifs of decadent temporality, of remnant or aftermath time. That funereal feeling vibrates, if that is the word, in the frigid dignity of its constricted prosody (all the more notable when we remember the stylistic hijinks for which this author is rightly famed). This is the manner Stephen brings to exquisitely painful perfection in his villanelle in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

Man (1916). And this is the imaginative attitude that Joyce returns to its historical origins and national provenances in *Ulysses*, in most concentrated form in the first three chapters (the Telemachiad), which feature Stephen as the embattled protagonist.

Considering the long shadow the sunset time of British Imperium still casts over its near colony in 1904, and taking into account the story of lost dominance that is recorded in the Joyce family story (authored by his improvident father), the younger writer's immersion in the conventions and sensibilities of decadence is understandable. By 1922, Joyce shows that earlier imaginative prepossession clearly. "Houses of decay, mine, his, and all," Stephen murmurs in the third chapter,[9] where this presentiment of decadence universal underlies and explains his earlier (1902, in the historical fiction of the novel) pilgrimage to its literary and artistic capital, Paris, which he recalls in the costume he still sports: "My Latin Quarter hat. God, we simply must dress the character."[10] More searchingly, Stephen rehearses an imaginative apprehension of language (philology is the designated concern of this third chapter) that matches the characteristic understandings of linguistic decadence, which he pictures in images he frames through a reference to Théophile Gautier, poetic predecessor of Baudelaire and Huysmans: "Before him the bloated carcass of a dog lay lolled on bladderwrack. The gunwale of a boat, sunk in sand. *Un coche ensablé* Louis Veuillot called Gautier's prose. The heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here. And these, the stoneheaps of dead builders, a warren of weasel rats. Hide gold there. Try it. You have some. Sands and stones. Heavy of the past."[11] An enriching debility of loss in linguistic history shows as the accumulations of sense in words that are layered in their own sort of palimpsestuous death, a golden but decaying and infested and (suggestively) stinking deposit. In the lengthened moment of these linguistic deliberations, Stephen asks himself, "What is that word known to all men?" and, moments later, recalling the "brother soul" of his friend Cranley, and fixing more particularly and intimately on "His arm: Cranley's arm," he seems to answer, suggestively and strikingly, "Wilde's love that dare not speak its name."[12] Whatever homosexual memories or apprehensions may attend this representation, it is a queering of linguistic history—in the radical understandings of nonreproductive antifuturity—that stands as the constellated sense of this chapter and, in its larger pattern of association, as the legacy of language the sensibility of decadence leaves to the young artist.

This sense of a late and decaying day in the history of language rhymes

with and is amplified by the representations of late imperial time through these first three chapters. The main figure of this end-of-empire-days feeling in Britain is the Englishman Haines. With Stephen and Buck Mulligan, *Haines* (with no first name, the French meaning of the surname—*hatred*—receives the stress) cohabits the Martello Tower, a Norman fortress built by the British against potential invasion by the French: this edifice stands as symbol and miniature of an island under British possession. In this symbolic field, Haines's current visit to Ireland on an antiquarian holiday provides an illustration of the cultural politics of the Celtic Revival, which, in Joyce's understanding (now shared by many cultural historians), reflect back on the circumstances of its British and Anglo-Irish constituencies specifically. This understanding features the Celtic fringe as a point of attraction for specifically English interests, which, in turn, present a symptom and expression of the waning strength of native Englishness. This condition is witnessed most indicatively in the loss of moral authority in the British imperial mission. "We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly," goes the confession of its not quite (just "rather") remorseful overlord; "It seems history is to blame," goes the equally lame self-exculpation.[13]

Not that Englishness has come to Ireland only to wither, and the longer imperial history fills out the larger force field of the author's relation to the conventions and sensibilities of decadence. Imperial appropriation of things Irish extends indeed to the mother tongue, and Haines is in fact living that history forward. The one person on the tower capable of speaking Irish, he is answered by the figure of Mother Ireland, visiting the tower in the person of the aged milk woman, with an apparently unwitting wit: "I'm told it's a grand language by them that knows."[14] If the English turn to the Irish fringe at this particular moment of political history provides the most obvious sign of the decaying center of British Imperium, Haines's takeover of indigenous speech also consummates a near-thousand-year era of imperial spoilage.

This circumstance presents the end of a history that signifies differently in 1922 than in 1904 to Joyce, and differently for him in both moments than to an Anglo-Irish writer such as Yeats or, more categorically, to English poets like Johnson and Dowson. For the Irishman, the conditions of late imperial time point forward more than backward, obviously more powerfully in the long interval in which *Ulysses* is being written, which includes the Rising of 1916, and certainly by 1922, when independence, though still fraught with the incipient division of Ireland, is being claimed. His interest in the attendant sensibility of literary decadence is accordingly limited. This limitation

shows in the diminishment of the role of a triumphant decadence, certainly of decadent triumphalism, in his fiction after *Portrait*. Reappearing in duress, then disappearing as protagonist in *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus inscribes a parabolic account of the life cycle of Joyce's own involvement in the sensibility of literary decadence, at least as a sensibility eventuating from the historical circumstance of late empire. The decaying strength of a British reign is not a strengthening decay for this Irish writer, and the shift of imaginative gravity to the character of Leopold Bloom puts the interest and value of the novel into a significantly different frame of literary reference.

Barnes and Beckett: Continuities, Comedies

The departures that Woolf and Joyce take from the conventions of decadence may be representative of gender concerns and cultural nationality as points of orientation to its literary sensibility. These orientations, however, do not predetermine outcomes: an author's individual choices, made within the densely convergent circumstances of literary and political history, determine outcomes. And so it is useful and potentially illuminating to view counterparts to Woolf and Joyce, a female modernist a decade younger and an Irishman of the next generation, taking the traditions that their predecessors will have left behind and not just extending but intensifying their representations. The fiction that Barnes and Beckett write from the end of the first third and the middle of the century witnesses an understanding of decadence as an imaginative consciousness that is fully established and indeed extensively conventionalized—so extensively, in fact, that both of their representative novels (Barnes's *Nightwood* [1937] and Beckett's trilogy *The Unnamable* [1951–53]) open in ways that acknowledge a consciousness of decadence as the establishing imaginative circumstance of their works.

On the opening pages of Barnes's novel, the presence of decadence as a conventional sensibility is so striking that one cannot help but think that a self-conscious parallel is being run with a signature work of decadent fiction. This is Huysmans's novel *À Rebours*, where the French title may be translated as either *Against the Grain* or *Against Nature*. This is a book that Arthur Symons dubbed "the breviary of the Decadence,"[15] and, as such, it offers itself as a summa of decadent preoccupations.

Huysmans's novel moves against the grain of nature in a number of ways. It defies both human diurnal time and human reproductive time. Its hero (if that is what he is) lives a counterclockwise life, sleeping by day and working (if that is what he does) by night. He is also, and manifestly, the last of his

line, defying the furtherance of the family name. As it turns out, moreover, that family name, Des Esseintes, centers a double measure in the story that is essential to the temporal imagination of decadence. That titular name is at once grandiose and dubious. The grandiosity in the origin story provides a metric for the greatness of decline, the affective power of loss. On the other side, however, its dubiety presents a challenge to the whole notion of legitimate originals, of authentic origins—to the feeling and idea of a romantic first of all, not just to the notion of experimental firsts but to the possibility of some enabling and strengthening alpha to the omega of contemporary dissolution. Original energy, like authentic origins, is a possibility not to be countenanced in these later days.[16]

Insofar as those later days appear in Huysmans's historical fiction as the end time of a particularly European cultural history, the American circumstance of Barnes's birth and earlier writing life provides a different orientation to that core story. In her native New York City, her first exposure to the literary and visual culture of decadence came in the bohemian milieu of Greenwich Village. There the minor cultural impresario Guido Bruno (his first name will recur, it turns out, in the family of false aristocrats and failing fortunes in *Nightwood*) centered a subculture of writers and artists who represented, in effect, an early generation of transatlantic decadence.[17] And while the conditions of imperial decline in the cultural imagination of European decadence look decidedly different in the story of the New World, the expansion of American hegemony augured little different from the European fate to a sensibility steeped in the literature of a specifically French decadence. And so we see Barnes following *À Rebours* closely in the story of false and faltering origins that she features in *Nightwood*.

The novel begins with the tale of Baron Guido Volkbein and the birth of his son, Baron Felix,[18] who is not just misnamed in having little to be happy about but also mistitled as "Baron." Orphaned at birth, the unhappy Felix is already and first of all taken out of a chain of generation he is unlikely to extend in any vital way. And he is a man whose origins are obscured in the story of a "baronage" that was, to begin with, forged. The "original" in this line of the Barons Volkbein turns out to have been "a Jew of Italian descent," whose "pretense to a barony" turns the origin story of the supposedly great family into a legend of falsehood original.[19] This is the fable of a fall that goes on falling, now through a long and lengthening story of origins ever more lost, of authenticities more and more doubtful, of illegitimacies ever great-

ening: "He had adopted the sign of the cross; he had said that he was an Austrian of an old, almost extinct line, producing, to uphold his story, the most amazing and inaccurate proofs: a coat of arms that he had no right to and a list of progenitors (including their Christian names) who had never existed."[20] In this legend of multigenerational decadence, Guido assumes the fittingly if stereotypically decadent postures of "both a gourmet and a dandy," while the disabled strength of this discreditable origin shows in due course in the offspring of the ill-fated Felix, whose one son, another Guido, "if born to anything, had been born to holy decay. Mentally deficient and emotionally excessive, an addict to death; at ten, barely as tall as a child of six, wearing spectacles, stumbling when he tried to run, with cold hand and anxious face, he followed his father, trembling with an excitement that was a precocious ecstasy."[21] Barons Guido and Felix and Guido and others are the static characters of a fiction of decadence that, in being so typical, will also invite and sustain the further work that Barnes will perform on existing conditions.

In this more or less continuous literary history, Beckett takes his own place. Where Barnes establishes the circumstances of literary decadence in her historical fiction, in her story of lengthening family decline, Beckett takes us to the room in which that signature story of decadence is written—from the beginning, in the opening paragraph of his great postwar trilogy. Here the physical and emotional conditions of decadent time are realized in the depiction of the writer of this book, these pages:

> I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind. I was helped. I'd never have got there alone. There's this man who comes every week. Perhaps I got here thanks to him. He says not. He gives me money and takes away the pages. So many pages, so much money. . . . The truth is I haven't much will left. When he comes for the fresh pages he brings back the previous week's. They are marked with signs I don't understand.[22]

An invalid, Beckett's persona embodies the condition of illness that reads as the most vivid and conspicuous sign of decline in the times of decrepitude. Separation from the supposedly vital resources of regenerative nature is complete: the self-enclosed chamber of writing houses a language that exists in the condition of print and that, as one index of its detachment from the otherwise natural language of voice, has been denaturalized into a mys-

terious and arbitrary system of written insignia. This mise-en-scène reads indeed as a point of completion in the long history of literary decadence. Here Beckett begins.

And so, for both authors: whither? While these two writers are identifying different centers of attention in the sensibility of decadence, they join efforts in adapting another literary genre to individual literary use and effect. This is mechanical comedy. Here the hallmark values of the artificial and the unnatural in the poetics of decadence, as imaged in its signature figures of the living picture in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the ventriloquist dummy in chapter 9 of *À Rebours*, all in all, the composite character of the human marionette, are substantially enhanced as cast in the dramatic character of the human machine. Here the ostensible paradox of a mechanical humanity generates the comic tension and provides for the comic release. It is a model of comedy operating in both Barnes and Beckett in the action of imaginative language. And we may preview its modular options and affective range by rereading the two documents that could be said to encapsulate the sensibility: Henri Bergson's *Rire* (*Laughter*), published in 1900, and Wyndham Lewis's "The Wild Body," written in 1918.

In both understandings, comedy turns on the comedian catching out a mechanical aspect in humanity. For Bergson, the naturally organic and ideally flexible element of the human character behaves for one moment as a mechanism, the audience recognizes the slip, and the laughter of recognition witnesses and asserts a true human superiority to such regression, such exception.[23] Rewriting and reversing Bergson but not altering the mechanical aspect of the comic incident, Lewis's comedian shows a human pretending to be better than the creaturely machine he reveals himself to be, while the laughter at such pretense attains, if not the Aristotelian catharsis of Bergson's version, at least the grimmer vindication of a recognition working in the elementary clarity of natural facts.[24]

If these two machines function as opposite but complementary models of comedy, their difference might be understood as one comprehensive response. They comprise an ongoing inflection of the emphases of decadence in the age of modernism. Here the inorganic character of artificial existence, one of the imaginative standbys in the sensibility of decadence, offers a moment of laughable exception to the norm of human subjectivity in 1900, just as the so-called decade of decadence is turning into the century already called "modern." Once this sense of the modern is conceptualized and stylized as "modernism," the difference between the human and the machine

provides its own charged and increasingly fraught center of attention. It is freighted with the experience of mass mechanical warfare, the vast European war of 1914-18, in the last year of which Lewis writes an answer to Bergson. The date encloses its own historical content and depth. And whether or not Barnes and Beckett knew either or both of these documents *à la lettre*, their sensibilities are formed within both a literary history and a public culture that has lived those issues into and through the climax and climacteric of a mechanical humanity in that Great War. So, over the long turn of the century, the genre of mechanical comedy may develop its own encapsulated version of the interaction of decadence and modernism, where the Bergsonian formula alternates with the Lewisian in the one evolving model of comic possibility, ranging as we will see from the redemptive to the somber and macabre.

In line with the interests depicted in the initial scene of Beckett's trilogy, the main opportunity of comedy lies in a drama of consciousness involving language, where the mechanical aspect of linguistic systems takes the stage. This is a mechanism whose energy is evidenced increasingly over the course of the long story of the trilogy in sentences that tend to ever-greater length. By the third novel, the prose is running like a thin tracer line along a consciousness, whose verbal formations propel the advance in a *perpetuum mobile* of words. Manic or not—and "manic" seems the apt word—this mechanical energy of language seems preternatural in being unstoppable but all too natural in the impact it registers, at least associatively, in the body of the writer, who (or which) declines in affective countermeasure to the ever-headier strength of the engine he is running, or being run (and run over) by. The body of mechanical comedy is both human and linguistic, and where the conventional sensibility of decadence has generated this imaginative understanding, the comic opportunity occurs within this system of driven words.

It is a comedy of appositives. Consider the little bits of phrasal interjection in the following passage, where the momentum of words is powerfully and increasingly evident:

> But I am human, *I fancy*, and my progress suffered, from this state of affairs, and from the slow and painful progress it had always been, whatever may have been said to the contrary, was changed, *saving your presence*, to a veritable Calvary, with no limit to its stations and no hope of crucifixion, *though I say it myself*, and no Simon, and reduced me to frequent halts. Yes, my progress reduced me to stop-

> ping more and more often, it was the only way to progress, to stop. And though it is no part of my tottering intentions to treat here in full, *as they deserve*, these brief moments of the immemorial expiation, I shall nevertheless deal with them briefly, out of the goodness of my heart, so that my story, so clear till now, may not end in darkness, the darkness of these towering forests, these giant fronds, where I hobble, listen, fall, rise, listen and hobble on, wondering sometimes, *need I say*, if I shall ever see again the hated light, at least unloved, stretched palely between the last boles, and my mother, to settle with her, and if I would not do better, at least just as well, to hang myself from a bough, with a liane.[25]

The extended series of phrasal and clausal conjunctions swings the clauses ahead relentlessly and indefinitely, it seems, but ultimately to a point that, by the end, has lost any sense of the period it is completing beyond the death into which its forward sense eventuates. Here is the deathward energy of the linguistic machine, where energy and entropy are twin, reciprocating principles. Into this mechanism of ever more headily driven words, however, the appositives are popped like comic accidents, or like accidents that provide the opportunity of comedy—in the Bergsonian sense. For, if the accidents catch out the mechanical character in humanity, they also locate moments of difference to the mechanistic energies of human speech. Gratuitous, these are grace notes, all in all, the small sounds redemption may make within an otherwise terrible energy of words. And it is within this rhythm that Beckett's typical figure of the comic automaton, at once more and less than human, both the glory and the jest of a human condition, comes into prominence. His is the voice of those comic appositives, of which "need I say"—the point of the grace note is that he *need not* say it—sounds its most telling and effective note.

Whether or not Beckett's Anglo-Irish background provides a background sound for the verbal comedy of his novels, another hyphenated, off-angle Irishman appears as the dominant voice in Barnes's novel: this is the Irish-American "Dr. Matthew O'Connor, an Irishman from the Barbary Coast (Pacific Street, San Francisco)."[26] Equal at least to Beckett's speaker in his rabid loquacity, O'Connor also appears as the central personage in the drama of linguistic consciousness here. It is a drama that enacts the most substantial issues in the sensibility of literary decadence. This so-called "Dr.," as dubiously titled as Barnes's doubtful Barons, belies the notion of authentic origins, taking up all that imposture involves in the codifying systems of decadence. Here the counterfeit physician takes his place in a room that,

matching the writing chamber in Beckett's overture, fills with the paraphernalia of decadence aplenty:

> A pile of medical books, and volumes of a miscellaneous order, reached almost to the ceiling, water-stained and covered with dust. Just above them was a very small barred window, the only ventilation. . . .
>
> In the narrow iron bed, with its heavy and dirty linen sheets, lay the doctor in a woman's flannel nightgown.
>
> The doctor's head, with its over-large black eyes, its full gun-metal cheeks and chin, was framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendant curls that touched his shoulders, and falling back against the pillow, turned up the shadowy interior of their cylinders. He was heavily rouged and his lashes painted.[27]

Lying abed during the day, this "Dr." lives the same counterclockwise life as the anti-natural calendar of Huysmans's Des Esseintes. There is the complementary contrary of the "unnatural," effeminized male. And where the room unopened to the world images the circumstance of unnatural artifice, so the geological deposit of books has supplanted nature in general and typified in particular the condition of print, the medium in which and about which the comedy of mechanical language is enacted.

The comic tension exists in the difference between the printed condition of any novel and the "talk" that Barnes stages and that "Dr." O'Connor feigns at such exceptional length. The immense stretches of this textual "talk" are interrupted from time to time by questions or interjections of auxiliary characters, but the pretense of exchange is just that: these are just prompts to the monologue that resumes quickly enough. Again and again, the would-be fiction of dramatic talk and natural language reverts to its true function: the driven mechanism of print, the inexorable engine of words inside quotation marks. A book talking as though it were human, the personage of O'Connor provides one version of the marionette figure that exerts such a powerful fascination within the dramatis personae of decadence, where the puppet depicts the figure of artifice supplanting the supposedly natural human constitution. And where the interruptions afford the moment of theatrical accident in Bergsonian comedy, offering the talker the opportunity of an adjustment to the human feeling of interaction, the opportunity slips just as quickly away.

This is the somber comedy of the unredeemed machine, where the comic model shifts from the Bergsonian to the Lewisian: unlike Beckett, Barnes dubs no grace notes of difference into the textual mechanism. That absence

ramifies powerfully and unsettlingly through this text, which, in the end, opens into a mechanistic bleakness of epic dimension. At its extremity, this is an effect that marks one extension of the sensibility of decadence in the age of modernism. And this is an effect whose intensity may be measured, and its significance assessed, in the attempt, unsuccessful as it will be, to breathe a reprieve into it.

This attempt comes from Barnes's first editor, T. S. Eliot. He concludes his short introduction to the book with a reference to "a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy."[28] Granted, there may be "horror and doom" in modern comedy no less than in Elizabethan tragedy (or comedy), but, in the end, and in view of the concluding scenes in Barnes's book in particular, Eliot's reference reads as nothing less, or more, than a despairing request for a return to an older model of drama, comic as well as tragic. It is a gesture of desperate hope for the possibility of Aristotelian catharsis—for that moment of recognition and reprieve whose comic miniatures appear in Beckett's fiction but not, in small or in large, in Barnes's.

Take her last chapter, "The Possessed," which brings Barnes's characters to American scenes. Here, in the vignette of her last paragraph, one of her protagonists is heard reverting to the behavior of her canine companion:

> Then she began to bark also, crawling after him—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry then, running with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her; soft and slow his feet went padding. He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees.[29]

Robin is "barking in a fit of laughter": this is not an animal laughing, were that possible; it is a human whose laughter reverts to animal sounds, all in all, to the animal-mechanical behavior to which Bergsonian laughter would prove its superiority. So, in this closing moment of the textual drama, we forgo the option and possibility of the dramatic catharsis that Bergson has modeled as Eliot's optimal wish. These final sentences read indeed as the consummation of the macabre comedy of nature's rude mechanicals in Barnes's decadent text.

The variation in the comic repertoires of Barnes and Beckett, the issues of gender and cultural nationalism in Woolf and Joyce—the legacy of deca-

dence in the age of modernism plays through the major tropes and recurring concerns of the literary imagination of these identifiably major novelists. This is a way of saying that that inheritance, even as it features death and decay at its center of imaginative attention, locates one of the most formidable growing points in the most important literature of the next century.

Notes

1. All three critics make the move, increasingly usual over the course of twentieth-century literary criticism, of turning "decadence" into "symbolism" as the formative force of late nineteenth-century aesthetics on modernist poetics. They are of course following the lead of Arthur Symons, whose *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) retitled and attempted to recast his original 1893 essay "The Decadent Movement in Literature." See Edmund Wilson, "Symbolism," in *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* (1931; repr., New York: Scribner's, 1971), 1–25, esp. 23; Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (1957; repr., New York: Routledge, 2002), 130; Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: U California P, 1971), xi, 179–86. I've addressed the history of this change of nomenclature, as well as some of its evident motives, in Vincent Sherry, "The Codes of Decadence: Modernism and Its Discontents," in *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), 1–36.

2. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1967), 96–98.

3. For the cultural as well as verbal etymology of "modernism" and the circulation of the word in the first years of the "modern" century, see Vincent Sherry, "Introduction: A History of 'Modernism,'" in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 1–25.

4. Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (1915; repr., New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 89.

5. Woolf, *Voyage Out*, 50–51.

6. Woolf, *Voyage Out*, 374–75.

7. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004), 1–66, esp. 10–11, 27, 41–50, 54–58.

8. Otherwise untitled, this poem appeared as the second piece ("II") in Joyce's first collection of verse, *Chamber Music*, a title whose punning humor is hard to detect in the poems themselves; in James Joyce, *Collected Poems* (1957; repr., New York: Vintage, 1969), 10.

9. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922), ed. Hans Walter Gabler et al. (New York: Random House, 1986), chap. 3, line 105.

10. Joyce, *Ulysses*, chap. 3, line 174.

11. Joyce, *Ulysses*, chap. 3, lines 286–91.

12. Joyce, *Ulysses*, chap. 3, lines 435, 450–51.

13. Joyce, *Ulysses*, chap. 1, lines 648–49.

14. Joyce, *Ulysses*, chap. 1, line 434.

15. Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899; repr., London: Archibald Constable, 1908), 3.

16. For a good contemporary translation, see Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Margaret Mauldon, ed. Nicholas White (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999).

17. For Barnes's exposure to literary and visual decadence in Greenwich Village, see Danielli Casellia, *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 5–9; and Stephen Rogers, "Bruno's Bohemia," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2, *North America 1894–1960*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thatch (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 445–64.

18. Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (1937; repr., New York: New Directions, 1961), 1–3.

19. Barnes, *Nightwood*, 1, 3.

20. Barnes, *Nightwood*, 3.

21. Barnes, *Nightwood*, 1, 107.

22. Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: "Molloy," "Malone Dies," "The Unnamable"* (New York: Grove, 1959), 1. Beckett is the translator of his own text, originally written in French.

23. "The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life. Consequently it calls for immediate corrective. This corrective is laughter, a social gesture that singles out and represses a special kind of absent-mindedness in men and events." Henri Bergson, *Laughter* (1900), in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (1956; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), 117. For more on the social uses and humanist values of Bergsonian laughter, see 145 and 187.

24. The best edition of this essay (printed several times) is Wyndham Lewis, "The Meaning of the Wild Body," in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara, CA: Black Sparrow, 1982). See esp. 158–60 for the quintessential comic vignette in Lewis's understanding, and 158, his framing aphorism, with Lewis's own emphases: "from that point of view all men are necessarily comic: for they are all *things*, or physical bodies, behaving as *persons*."

25. Beckett, *Three Novels*, 103.

26. Barnes, *Nightwood*, 14.

27. Barnes, *Nightwood*, 78–79.

28. Barnes, *Nightwood*, xvi.

29. Barnes, *Nightwood*, 170.

8 "The Woodland Whose Depths and Whose Heights Were Pan's" Swinburne and Lawrence, Decadence and Modernism

Howard J. Booth

In his 1985 study *Decadent Style*, John R. Reed offered a model for the relationship between decadence and modernism. The former, he noted, is "associated with an autumnal, frustrated mood" that "elaborates on existing form to the point of apparent dissolution, but a new order arises out of the old method."[1] Modernism, on the other hand, sees the adoption of new, radically different forms. I argue here that D. H. Lawrence, in ways that parallel the decadents in Reed's schema, continued to open up existing literary forms and styles. Lawrence believed that this offered the best hope of discovering a world beyond modernity, while maintaining that the details of this new order could not be fully discerned.[2] He was not the kind of modernist who asserted that he had made a full break from his literary forebears and had a fully realized alternative to offer. I compare Lawrence's use of the Pan figure and nympholepsy with that of Algernon Swinburne—a poet whom Lawrence greatly admired—and examine their shared anti-Cartesianism and use of mythopoeia. Lawrence differed from Swinburne in important ways, though: his writing sought to bring about new ways of living, looked beyond classical antiquity to other cultures, did not remain wholly within existing literary forms, and was even more radical in its consideration of the body, sex, and gender.

"The Proper Study": Toward "a New Relation, in a New Whole"

Lawrence's 1923 essay "The Proper Study" provides an initial example of his debt to, and divergence from, Swinburne's decadence.[3] It is much less well known than an essay from the start of that year entitled "The Future of the Novel," in which Lawrence attacks what he sees as the self-consciousness of the writing of James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Dorothy Richardson. For

all its innovation, Lawrence was critical of modern literature for not asking what comes next: "What is the underlying impulse in us that will provide the motive-power for a new state of things, when this democratic-industrial-lovey-dovey-darling-take-me-to-mammy state of things is bust?"[4] "The Proper Study" responds to this question by utilizing and extending an image of a weary river wending its way to the sea to explore the exhaustion of modern thought; Michael Black has shown that Lawrence preferred thinking using the progression suggested by images rather than logic and reason.[5] The essay offers up a short "myth-story," as Lawrence puts it in the foreword to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, of future transformation.[6]

As the title of "The Proper Study" would suggest, one literary precedent that Lawrence is drawing on is Alexander Pope's *The Essay on Man*; he quotes the two famous lines in question: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan. / The proper study of mankind is man."[7] However, in objecting to Pope's view that the Delphic injunction to know oneself must not pass over into the territory reserved for God, the essay soon turns instead to Oscar Wilde and Algernon Swinburne. Lawrence endorses a decadent perspective on moral injunctions: "as Oscar Wilde says, what's a temptation for, except to be succumbed to!"[8] Swinburne's verse provides Lawrence with images, myth, and a language that he can use to pursue his ideas, as well as suggesting that he believed that it was widely known by his readers. The essay begins by recasting lines from Swinburne's "The Garden of Proserpine": "If no man lives forever, neither does any precept. And if even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea, so does the weariest wisdom." Lawrence referred to "The Garden of Proserpine" a number of times in his letters, even parodying the poem and its enjoyment of despair on one occasion. While sharing the poem's bleak assessment of life in modern conditions, he reacted against its hopelessness and any suggestion of savoring despair.[9]

In "The Proper Study" Lawrence presses Swinburne's river image past the stage where the weary river reaches the sea—beyond, the suggestion is, decadent exhaustion and ennui. The argument and image go beyond the possible—humans living in the sea—to figure a transition to a form of life that is truly other and different. In the closing paragraphs Lawrence asks whether

> conscious men . . . also wind wearily to sea in a divine ether, which means nothing to us but space and words and emptiness? We wind wearily to sea in words and emptiness.

> But man is a mutable animal. Turn into the Fish, the Pisces of man's final consciousness, and you'll start to swim again in the great life which is so frighteningly godly that you realise your previous presumption.
>
> And then you realise the new relation of man. Men like fishes lifted on a great wave of the God of the End, swimming together, and apart in a new medium. A new relation, in a new whole.[10]

Here the end of the essay imagines a second coming in the end times, though one not of Jesus the Son of God but of humankind. The meanings around not only landscape but also time and closure are reconceived; the mature river reaching the sea would have been the expected end of the short narrative.[11] The new condition beyond the present and its forms of expression is gestured toward through Lawrence's negotiation with Swinburne's decadence. In "The Proper Study" and elsewhere Lawrence pushes on existing forms like those of the decadents and intensifies the effort to attain a "new order," but there is no final sense of arrival, nor indeed is it possible to describe in detail the form that changed world would take.

"The Proper Study" shows Lawrence searching for forms of transformation that would bring about a new order. He remained broadly within the terms of Nietzsche's structuring binary between the Dionysian and the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the relationship between disruption and order that was so important in the late nineteenth century. Discovering the precise terms of the new structures was, however, deferred. Like such writing published in the Edwardian period as E. M. Forster's "The Story of a Panic" and "Other Kingdom" and Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*, Lawrence questioned the stultifying complacency and rigidity of modern life by using the figure of Pan to explore alternative ways of being in the world.[12]

Lawrence's Initial Response to Swinburne

As his response to Swinburne confirms, Lawrence was often in dialogue with earlier writers. It oversimplifies to stress only his differences from past writing, where examples might include the claims that he moved beyond the tragic plots and overripe style of his first two novels, *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser*, or that he was, in Harold Bloom's terms, a "strong" writer who created a space for his own texts through negative characterizations of the work of his predecessors.[13] Lawrence was not dismissive of Swinburne, as were many male high modernists. In Catherine Maxwell's words, "Pound, Eliot, Yeats, and their *confrères* applied themselves to the

task of freeing themselves from Swinburne, a labour they performed chiefly through acts of hostility, aggression and disavowal."[14] In claiming Swinburne as a radical writer, Lawrence was closer to women modernists; his friend H.D., for example, recognized in Swinburne a positive depiction of women's desire and lesbianism.[15] Lawrence's enthusiasm for the writing of aestheticism and decadence ran deep; Violet Hunt noted that he was "more conversant with decadent poetry" than either she or her then partner Ford Madox Hueffer, later Ford Madox Ford.[16] An early example of Lawrence responding to Swinburne in his writing is found in his 1909 play *A Collier's Friday Night*, where the poet stands in for education, poetry, and the life of the mind.[17]

Lawrence saw in Swinburne a response to an earlier stage of modern change, remarkable for his depiction of the relationship of mind and body and of the self to the world. Ross C. Murfin saw Lawrence and Swinburne as anti-Cartesian writers in a 1978 study.[18] However, more recent criticism has discussed the ontological turn in Lawrence without exploring its relationship to aestheticism and decadence. Rather, the influence of Nietzsche on early modernist journal culture in Britain and Lawrence's engagement with German intellectual life have been to the fore.[19] Discussion of the latter focuses on Lawrence's links with Heidelberg and Munich intellectual circles through Else Jaffe, the sister of his wife-to-be, Frieda.[20]

A highly influential reading by Michael Bell sees Lawrence as part of a modernist shift from Cartesian subject/object relationship toward the relational and ontology. Comparing ideas in circulation in the modernist period, Bell often places Lawrence alongside Heidegger; language for Lawrence is the result of modern damage and the effort to close the split between mind and body and between self and other.[21] In his fiction, Bell argues, "Lawrence blurs the distinction between an objectively existing outer world and the subjectivity of a character."[22] His whole project can be seen as the effort to move beyond modern splits and divisions. An example is Lawrence's characteristic use of free indirect discourse that begins with *Sons and Lovers*; it is not possible to decide whether what is being said is focalized through a character or comes from the narrator, and instead the statements and feelings exist somewhere "between" the two.[23]

Lawrence's anti-Cartesianism and interest in embodied form were in part constructed through an engagement with aestheticism and decadence. In his 1914 text the *Study of Thomas Hardy*, which established much of the thinking Lawrence was to draw on in *The Rainbow*, he discussed Swinburne as a modern subject who, while not divided, does not achieve a true internal

balance either.[24] Writing to Barbara Low on 11 September 1916, after she sent him a volume of Swinburne for his thirty-first birthday, Lawrence praised Swinburne for pushing language and expression in order to effect forms of "realisation," where this is not wholly mental and spiritual:

> Thank you very much indeed for the Swinburne. I lie in bed and read him, and he moves me very deeply. The pure realisation in him is something to reverence: he is . . . very like Shelley, full of philosophic spiritual realisation and revelation. He is a great revealer, very great. I put him with Shelley as our greatest poet. He is the last fiery spirit among us. How wicked the world has been, to jeer at his physical appearance etc. There was more powerful rushing flame of life in him than in all the heroes rolled together. One day I shall buy all his books. I am very glad to have these poems always by me.[25]

After an initial stress on the "spiritual realisation and revelation" shared with Shelley, there is a shift to the physical and mental being part of the same "flame of life." In noting Swinburne's "fiery spirit" and "powerful rushing flame of life," Lawrence evokes Walter Pater's "hard gem-like flame" in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*; it seems, though, to be a less focused jet.[26] For Michael F. Davis, Pater incarnates "the non-speculative, non-metaphysical thinker . . . , the physical thinker, one who 'thinks' through and with the body."[27] In his essays on American literature and his two books on psychoanalysis Lawrence located thought in a number of bodily centers, a "biological psyche"; with modernity the mind had become overly dominant.[28]

Myths, images, and symbols, rather than conventional argument, were used to explore the reconnection of what has been sundered, either within the self or in the relationship of the self to the world. The symbolism and myths often focused on dissolution and rebirth, especially in the war years.[29] Michael Bell sees Lawrence, along with W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and others, as utilizing modernist mythopoeia, stressing "the original mythopoeic marriage of poetry and philosophy."[30] Bell notes that Lawrence's mythopoeia is not disinterested; rather, there are underlying beliefs and commitments, what he calls "grounding."[31] As we shall see, Lawrence takes up strong positions but adopts forms that allow for a plurality of positions to be represented. Yisrael Levin sees mythopoeia in late Swinburne being used to suggest that all value systems are coercive and problematic.[32] Other critics, such as Murfin, see the very strength of Swinburne's rejection of established views on religion and politics as showing the underlying persistence of his initial identification with conventional beliefs.[33] I will argue that Swinburne's late

poetry, for all its insights and radicalism, still relies on traditional poetic form and language and conventional attitudes toward sex and gender.

Pan and Nympholepsy: Swinburne's "A Nympholept" and D. H. Lawrence's "Pan in America"

Lawrence's myth making differs from that found in the writing of aestheticism and decadence that he knew so well because it is freer and more open; for example, his references range beyond classical antiquity. Late Lawrence in particular sees the opening up of existing forms combined with strong, if highly provisional, assertions. In what follows I will compare the use of Pan and nympholepsy in Swinburne and Lawrence. Representations of Pan shifted a number of times in the nineteenth century, though summary accounts carry risks; as Nick Freeman has noted, it is important to think about how Pan is deployed by particular writers in specific texts.[34] The Pan who is said to have died at the moment when Jesus entered the world, a Pan of midcentury doubt because he suggested the rise and fall of religions, in time gave way to a disturbing eruptive Pan that reminds humankind of its place in the natural world. If the Pan figure in texts such as those by Machen and Forster stressed this Dionysian, unpredictable, and violent force, then nympholepsy was used to figure connection. In order to discuss recovery from modern damage, Lawrence depicted an eruptive Pan but tried to maintain—despite the problems with doing so—the broad outlines of the reconnection and healed world that would follow disruption; the future, though, could not be fully known or described.

Through the nineteenth century the frustrated passion of men for nymphs became a way of thinking about the gap between the modern mind and nature. As Roslyn Jolly has written, "[Nympholepsy] named a spiritual condition that was one of the most important legacies of the European classical heritage to Romantic and Victorian writers: the yearning for a mythopoeic connection with the natural world, coupled with the alienated sense that such a connection was no longer possible."[35] The key founding moment in nineteenth-century poetry's exploration of the theme, Byron on Egeria in book 4 of *Childe Harolde's Pilgrimage*, was followed by two major developments. The first was a debate over whether the gap between humans and nature had become unbridgeable. In his *Sketches in Italy and Greece* of 1874 John Addington Symonds states that "nothing can again identify us with the simple natural earth," but his text hopes that somewhere self and nature are still integrated, as they were in classical times: "Surely, in some far off glade,

by the side of lemon-grove or garden, near the village, there must be still a pagan remnant of glad Nature-worship."[36] The second was that sex offers a natural connective force in opposition to modern alienation. For Edward Carpenter in *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*, "when the Civilisation-period has passed away, the old Nature-religion—perhaps greatly grown—will come back . . . long before Christianity existed, the sexual and astronomical were the main forms of religion. That is to say, men instinctively felt and worshipped the great life coming to them through Sex, the great life coming to them from the deeps of Heaven. They deified both."[37] Symonds and Carpenter, in their writings, sought to maintain the legitimacy of male-male desire, but more often than not the desire for oneness between men and nature using nympholepsy has female deities responding to perceived male heterosexual needs. Elided with nature, co-opted into male experiences, the nymphs lack agency. Equating nymphs and young girls, what we might call the Nabokovian meaning of the word, first entered the OED as late as 2004, but the power relationship in nympholepsy was present from the start.

Pan and nympholepsy combine in Swinburne's major late poem "A Nympholept." Swinburne criticism in recent decades has rightly reclaimed the late verse from the view that it retreats from the world into obscurity. Jerome J. McGann's reading of "A Nympholept" in his great 1972 study of Swinburne retains its force: "A Nympholept" is a poem about transformation itself, rather than the changed state that follows.[38] For Levin, "A Nympholept" sees Swinburne temporarily moving away from the Apollonian concerns of much of his late work in favor of a darker, wooded vision. The nymph offers only a temporary experience and respite, with the later poem "The Lake of Gaube" returning to the Apollonian with a heightened stress on living in the moment over the adoption of fixed positions.[39] The end state that follows transformation is not central to these readings; what fascinates is the position on the edge of the known world.

"A Nympholept" maintains elements of the old order, rather than wholly anticipating modernist anti-foundationalism. Pan is all pervasive, not visible but nevertheless changing the world for good and ill. Though Pan is described a number of times as being on the edge of invading the selfhood of the I-voice, that subjectivity is somehow set apart, a separate and integral human subject until the end of the poem. Such a Pan belongs to a past time:

> Men felt and feared thee of old, whose pastoral clans
> Were given to the charge of thy keeping; and soundless panic
> Held fast the woodland whose depths and whose heights were Pan's.[40]

The I-voice feels that he, like "old men,"[41] will "quail if thy breath smite me";[42] the power of Pan over the modern self is noted, though it is also located in the past. An observing self remains intact at the point where the gap between the male I-voice and the natural world seems to be most prominent—"What helps it man . . . ?"[43]—which is when the nympholeptic yearning is answered by "A form, a face, a wonder to sense and sight,"[44] where "her eyes embolden / Fear, till it change to desire, and desire to delight."[45] Catherine Maxwell argues that the I-voice "is incorporated into her greater presence, just as other Swinburnian subjects are absorbed into the oceanic body of the female sublime."[46] It is troubling, though, that the nymph's role in "A Nympholept"—as described by the male I-voice at any rate—is to help a man:

> Thee, therefore, thee would I come to, cleave to, cling,
> If haply thy heart be kind and thy gifts be good,
> Unknown sweet spirit, whose vesture is soft in spring,
> In summer splendid, in autumn pale as the wood
> That shudders and wanes and shrinks as a shamed thing should,
> In winter bright as the mail of a war-worn king
> Who stands where foes fled far from the face of him stood.[47]

The language here evokes conventional feminine attributes, and the imagery suggests a sexuality at once orgasmic and modest; the nymph also helps protect and shield the I-voice. The feminine is a bridge between men and nature, and aligned with the latter.

Lawrence uses Pan and nympholepsy to imagine a resolution of the split and division between humankind and the world. Without returning to the past, which is not possible, what once existed will exist once more in some form. Connection in the present involves sexual difference and the established gender hierarchies, though in the past such divisions did not exist, and neither did the need for language and communication. The fiction utilizes open forms that allow for multiple positions to be articulated, even though those certain positions are supported by the narrative voice. Particularly important among Lawrence's so-called Pan cluster of texts from 1924–26 is the essay "Pan in America," written at the Lawrences' ranch above Taos in New Mexico in May–June 1924.[48] After noting that Pan was hardly a benign, comfortable figure—"he was almost more demon than god"—the nympholeptic yearning for reconnection is seen as taking over those humans who

saw the nymph: "The man who looked up to see the white arms of a nymph flash as she darted behind the thick wild laurels, away from him, followed helplessly. He was a nympholept. Fascinated by the swift limbs and the wild, fresh sides of the nymph, he followed forever, forever, in the endless monotony of his desire. Unless came some wise being who could absolve him from the spell."[49] Lawrence sees the surviving myths—this is at once myth making and a reflection on myth—as capturing an earlier condition, before the split of self from the world, and of the mind from the body, that led to sexual desire and language: "When Pan was greatest, he was not even Pan. He was nameless and unconceived, mentally. Just as a small baby new from the womb may say Mama! Dada! Whereas in the womb it said nothing, so humanity, in the womb of Pan, said nought. But when humanity was born into a separate idea of itself, it said *Pan*!"[50] An earlier manuscript version of the essay, first published in 2009, drew out the implications of the argument further, particularly as regards gender. There Lawrence utilized the now-discredited etymology for Pan as derived from a word meaning "all":

> Before the gentleman with the brown face and horns and goat legs was visualised, before the hosts of nymphs and dryads, fauns and satyrs were discriminated among the flowers and fruit, <an older,> {a greater,} darker, more mysterious presence. The Pan who was Everything, and a very great god, among the most ancient of trees. When trees were trees, and spoke aloud, without needing any dryad to voice them. When waters in themselves went running and intending, and no nymph could rise out of them, to leave them spiritless.
>
> Because after all, this faun and nymph business was the first step in the Spirit and Matter split. The nymphless spring of water was matter spiritless.
>
> The great Pan was not even a god. He was not even *he*. Only Pan, All.[51]

Initially there was no gender division, and so no need for myths of reconnection. The use of trees to represent a human connection with nature in modernist art is not unique to Lawrence.[52] Examples of the merging of human forms and trees include Nikolai Astrup's sequence of "troll tree" images, undertaken between 1917 and 1920 and entitled *Spring Night and Willow* and *A Morning in March*,[53] and Richard Strauss's 1938 opera *Daphne*, which ends with a transformation scene in which Daphne becomes one of the trees she so loves.[54] In works from the mid-1920s on Lawrence used the trope of a female force overcoming male modern division, but he adopted—some would say co-opted—the female perspective.

Late Lawrence: Moving Form beyond Decadence

Lawrence continued to refer to Swinburne in the 1920s, taking things further at the level of content and seeing the opening up of form itself as productive of newness and alternatives. The short novel *St. Mawr*, written in the summer of 1924,[55] explores a modern world in which the gap between the sexes and nature cannot be closed. Modern women may be unable to form relationships with men because the latter are not connected to the natural world. The horse St. Mawr is linked to a disruptive Pan when he throws Rico, who stands in for modern artists and masculinity. Mrs. Witt has long had little to do with men "because I couldn't see that peculiar hidden Pan in any of them. And I became that I needed to. . . . Never the hidden Pan"; such a Pan would be different from the "Pan with goat legs and a leer."[56] She feels—mistakenly as it turns out—that she may have seen the god in her groom Lewis. The open ending of the novella depicts Lou Witt sensing on her New Mexico ranch some other Pan-like presence (though it is not called Pan). This "spirit" that "soothes" Lou also needs and wants her, without wanting to change Lou: "And I am here, right deep in America, where there's a wild spirit wants me, a wild spirit more than men. And it doesn't want to save me either. It needs me. It craves for me."[57]

A different relationship between gender and nature is seen in the novel that Lawrence drafted on either side of writing of *St. Mawr*, titled *The Plumed Serpent*. It explores the rise to power in Mexico of a political and religious movement that draws on Aztec culture. In the wild landscape and political context of Mexico there seems to be nothing to keep eruptions of a violent and disturbing Pan in check. He is manifested in the general and revolutionary leader Cipriano, who exerts a male force over the central character, the European visitor Kate Leslie: "As he sat in silence, casting the old, twilit Pan-power over her, she felt herself submitting, succumbing. . . . Back to the twilight of the ancient Pan world, where the soul of woman was dumb, to be forever unspoken."[58] Here the power relation between the sexes exists even in the silent world before the splits and divisions that led to a need for language. However, the form of the novel comes to feel very open—indeed, for Michael Bell with *The Plumed Serpent* the novel form has become as open as at any time since the eighteenth century.[59] Other positions are aired, for example, that of Carlota, who remains loyal to the Roman Catholic Church, and the novel is left to drift toward its close, allowing for a variety of perspectives to be expressed. The first draft of the novel, *Quetzalcoatl*, ends

with Kate packing up ahead of a return, to be undertaken without enthusiasm, to Europe; she is to leave the movement that is bringing back the old preconquest Mexican gods.[60] The close of the finished novel is ambivalent in a different way: Kate does not resolve to leave, but the prospect is never far from her mind.[61] However, the modern Irish woman is left reviewing both the changing Mexico and her relationship with Cipriano with some detachment; the male world of the Pan figure is not all encompassing, as Kate is far from "dumb."

Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928), Lawrence's last novel, manifests an openness of form that provides the reader with different positions from those supported by the narrative voice and the shape of the narrative. It explores individual rebirth in postwar Britain through Connie Chatterley's relationship with Oliver Mellors, her husband Clifford's gamekeeper. Lawrence's response to late Victorian writing on Pan and nympholepsy is taken furthest here, although there is only one direct reference to Pan in the novel. Late in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Mellors maintains that Pan is the god for working-class masculinity: "They should be alive and frisky, and acknowledge the great god Pan. He's the only god for the masses, forever."[62] However, as Peter Fjågesund has pointed out, Connie Chatterley experiences contact with Oliver Mellors in the manner of an eruptive Pan from the start. Though we learn that he simply "strode swiftly, softly" out of the wood, Connie's initial response is strong: "he had frightened Connie, he seemed to emerge with such swift menace. That was how she had seen him, like a sudden rush of a threat out of nowhere."[63]

Lady Chatterley's Lover both undermines female agency—it suggests that women have to learn to accept a dominant male—and is so open in form that it allows in other positions, including that women might well be better off without men. Early in her relationship with Mellors, Connie feels at times that men are to be conquered; she is described as being "passionate like a bacchante," and "she felt the force of the Bacchae in her limbs and her body: the woman gleaming and rapid, beating down the male."[64] When Clifford reads Racine out loud to Connie—he would rather be listening to the radio—she imagines herself, in a remarkable passage, metamorphosing into something "like a forest" with all its interconnections:

> She was gone in her own soft rapture, like a forest soughing with the dim, glad moan of spring, moving into bud. She could feel in the same world with her the man, the nameless man, moving on beautiful feet, beautiful in the phallic mystery.

> And in herself, in all her veins, she felt him and his child, him and his child. His child was in all her veins, like a twilight.
>
> "For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor feet, nor golden
> Treasure of hair—"
>
> She was like a forest, like the dark interlacing of the oakwood, humming inaudibly with myriad unfolding buds. Meanwhile the birds of desire were asleep in the vast interlaced intricacy of her body.[65]

The quotation is from Swinburne's "The Pilgrims" from *Songs before Sunrise*.[66] Lawrence substitutes Swinburne's interest in nerves as the interface between the mind and body with veins and so the blood. The contact with nature, though, relies on a male figure: "him and his child." The "nameless man" suggests Pan; the child, "in all her veins"—and so not a nymph as in "A Nympholept"—serves as a transitional figure, the betwixt and between of the twilight, the coming of night, and the life of the next day.

Connie's assertions of female power are questioned because of their alignment with aestheticism. The repetition of the word "beautiful" in the sentences before and after the Swinburne quotation suggests a retreat into an aesthetic realm. As the narrative voice of *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, written in the early weeks of 1926, observes, referring to Tennyson's *The Lady of Shallot*, "The tirra-lirraing days seem to have gone by."[67] In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the powerfully expressed oneness of nature, drawing on nineteenth-century poetry and felt by Connie while Clifford reads Racine aloud, is said to be powerless when faced with the separation and division of the modern world that has to be faced and confronted. On the night of the reading, after Connie has gone to bed, having forgotten to kiss Clifford goodnight, Mellors approaches Wragby Hall only to feel that he must leave it to Connie to come to him. Not long after, during her drive through Tevershall, Connie reflects on the "under-world" created by industrial England's transformation of ordinary people, the class from which Mellors comes.[68] When she next goes to the woods and has sex with Mellors, she finds both him and the sexual act absurd and becomes very upset. A new stage in the sexual relationship follows, but only because Connie stops asserting her distinct perspective on the world: "It was from herself she wanted to be saved, from her own inward anger and resistance."[69]

However, such an account, with Swinburne linked to what Connie has to give up, will not do on its own. It leaves out the opening up of the realist

novel, a modified version of the way decadence stretched existing forms, so that a number of alternative positions are accommodated. The multiple positions caught in the novel make it both the vehicle and the testing ground for a range of ideas, for what Lawrence termed a "thought-adventure."[70] One of the most striking examples of this in Lawrence is when the narrative voice in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* starts, self-reflexively, to maintain "the vast importance of the novel, properly handled" in capturing flows of sympathy and recoil.[71] The novel reflects on its own genre; at the formal level this can be compared to the way Pan erupts into conventional plots in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writing.

The narrative voice of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is prescriptive about relationships and sex; however, the novel represents what plot and narration condemn. For example, Mellors's vituperative accounts of the sex he had with his wife, Bertha Coutts, which he claims shows she must really be a lesbian, simultaneously offer the reader a counterview. Bertha would seek her own satisfaction in ways that leave out Mellors: "And when I'd come and really finished, then she'd start on her own account, and I had to stop inside her till she brought herself off, wriggling and shouting. And when I'd gone little as anything, she'd clutch clutch clutch with herself down there, an' then she'd come-off, fair in ecstasy. An' then she'd say: That was lovely! . . . She had to work the thing herself, grind her own coffee."[72] Bertha's sense of unselfconscious connection with her body and its pleasures suggests an overcoming of nympholeptic yearning. The reference to "grind her own coffee" draws on the Bessie Smith song "Empty Bed Blues." The song becomes part of the novel's open frame of reference—even though Lawrence was highly suspicious of popular culture and new media such as radio and film, seeing them as symptomatic of modern degradation[73]—and helps represent the experience of a woman who ignores male expectations, is at one with her body, and declares her experience to be "lovely."

Swinburne's mythopoeic and anti-Cartesian writing entered into the very fabric of Lawrence's thought and writing. Though Swinburne questions different worldviews in his late verse, he recirculates established tropes such as a female closeness to nature and retains a tight control over verse form and complex meanings—all of which imply a position from which control can be exercised. Lawrence, alternatively and of course imperfectly, seeks strategies for finding a place beyond modern conditions, even if that new world and order cannot be fully known. He took the way decadence loosened existing literary forms and social norms ever further, letting slip the reins of

control over meaning and form, hoping as a result that answers to the damage wrought by modernity would emerge.

Notes

1. John R. Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1985), 11.

2. A possible exception is Lawrence's text "A Dream of Life"; this, though, is a utopian text, and Lawrence left it incomplete. (It is in the Cambridge Edition of Lawrence's Works under another title; both are nonauthorial: D. H. Lawrence, "[Autobiographical Fragment]," in *Late Essays and Articles*, ed. James T. Boulton [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004], 50–70.) On Lawrence's relationship to late Victorian utopian writing, see Howard J. Booth, "'At Last to Newness': D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and the Dream of a Better World," *Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 19–44.

3. "The Proper Study" was finished by 17 September 1923. D. H. Lawrence, "The Proper Study," in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, ed. Michael Herbert (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 169–73. For the date of composition, see xxxiii, xiii.

4. D. H. Lawrence, "The Future of the Novel," in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 154. Lawrence sent off the essay on 1 February 1923 (xlv).

5. Michael Black, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Philosophical Works, A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

6. D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, in "*Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious" and "Fantasia of the Unconscious,"* ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 63.

7. Lawrence, "Proper Study," 169, quoting Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, epistle 2, lines 1–2, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen, 1963), 516.

8. Lawrence, "Proper Study," 170. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Lord Henry Wotton observes that "the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it," and Lord Darlington in *Lady Windermere's Fan* says, "I can resist everything except temptation." Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde: Stories, Plays, Poems, Essays* (London: Collins, 1966), 29, 388. The response to Wilde in Lawrence is usually attended with a caveat, that Wilde allowed society to turn upon him. As he notes in *Sea and Sardinia*, "What a terrible mistake to allow oneself to be martyred by a load of canaille." D. H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia*, ed. Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 16.

9. Lawrence, "Proper Study," 169. The relevant lines of Swinburne's "The Garden of Proserpine" run "We thank with brief thanksgiving / Whatever gods may be / That no life lives for ever; / That dead men rise up never; / That even the weariest river /

Winds somewhere safe to sea." *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 6 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), 1:171, lines 83-88. Lawrence quoted lines from the poem in two letters from March and April 1920. See *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. 3, *1916-21*, ed. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 497, 504. For the April 1915 parody in a letter to his friend S. S. Koteliansky, see *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. 2, *1913-16*, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 317.

10. Lawrence, "Proper Study," 173.

11. For recent work on decadent landscape and temporality, see Alex Murray, *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016); and Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), esp. 37-87.

12. Pan in Lawrence's writing is discussed in Keith Sagar, "Lawrence and the Resurrection of Pan," in *Literature and the Crime against Nature* (London: Chaucer, 2005), 282-311. Brian Finney in his edition of *St. Mawr and Other Stories* argued for a "Pan cluster" of American fiction in the mid-1920s. D. H. Lawrence, *St. Mawr and Other Stories*, ed. Brian Finney (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), xxi. However, Lawrence's "The Overtone," unpublished in Lawrence's lifetime, is misdated in Finney's volume. It was probably written not as he suggested, in April 1924 (xi), but in late January 1913. See Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "Re-dating 'The Overtone,'" *D. H. Lawrence Review* 25 (1993-94): 75-80. Mark Kinkead-Weekes links the story to E. M. Forster's Pan story "Other Kingdom," which Lawrence could well have seen in the July 1909 issue of the *English Review*. Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile: 1912-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 730, 775n35, 64-66.

13. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973), 69. The best example is Lawrence's changing response to Walt Whitman, as he moved from adulation to attack. See D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, ed. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), xxiii-lxxix, 358-69, 401-30, 148-61.

14. Catherine Maxwell, *Swinburne* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2006), 4.

15. See Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

16. Violet Hunt, *The Flurried Years* (London: Hurst & Blackett, [1926]), 48.

17. D. H. Lawrence, *A Collier's Friday Night*, in *The Plays*, ed. Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 18.

18. Ross C. Murfin, *Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence and the Burden of Belief* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1978), 171-72. Murfin is the only critic to date to have compared Swinburne and Lawrence at length. See also his "Hymn to Priapus: Lawrence's Poetry of Difference," *Criticism* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 214-29.

19. See Anne Fernihough, *Freewomen and Supermen: Edwardian Radicals and Literary Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

20. See Martin Green, *The Von Richthofen Sisters: The Triumphant and the Tragic Modes of Love: Else and Frieda Von Richthofen, Otto Gross, Max Weber, and D. H. Lawrence in the Years 1870–1970* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974); and Carl Krockel, *D. H. Lawrence and Germany: The Politics of Influence* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

21. Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992). See also Anne Fernihough, *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 140–70.

22. Michael Bell, "D. H. Lawrence, Philosophy and the Novel: A Nagging Question," *Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies* 3, no. 3 (2014): 57.

23. Helen Baron, "Disseminated Consciousness in *Sons and Lovers*," *Essays in Criticism* 48, no. 4 (1998): 357–78; and Violeta Sotirova, *D. H. Lawrence and Narrative Viewpoint* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

24. The reference to Swinburne in the *Study of Thomas Hardy* comes in an extensive exploration of how the world order associated with the God of the Old Testament—linked to the Father, Supreme Law, and aligned with the body—gives way to one of the Son and Love. Swinburne reacts against Christianity: "And the poet sings the Supreme Law to gain rebalance in himself, for he hovers on the edge of death, of Not-Being, he is always out of reach of the Law, bodiless, in the faintness of Love that has triumphed and denied the Law, in the dread of an overdeveloped, oversensitive soul which exists always on the point of dissolution from the body." Lawrence has a crucial qualification, however: "But he is not divided against himself. It is the novelists and the dramatists who have the hardest task in reconciling their metaphysic, their theory of being and knowing, with their living sense of being." Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, 91.

25. Lawrence, *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, 2:653–54.

26. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 152.

27. Michael F. Davis, "Walter Pater's 'Latent Intelligence' and the Conceptions of 'Queer Theory,'" in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Hall Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT, 2002), 268.

28. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 132. See David Ellis, "Lawrence and the Biological Psyche," in *D H. Lawrence: Centenary Essays*, ed. Mara Kalnins (Bristol, UK: Bristol Classical Press, 1986), 89–109.

29. Dissolution could be either part of a slide toward death or a necessary casting off of the old in order to make possible new and better forms of life. Birkin and Ursula's discussion of the marsh flowers in the "Water-Party" chapter of *Women in Love* draws on Baudelaire and Heraclitus on flux via John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*, first published in 1892, as well as Romantic poetry and thought. D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, ed. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 172–73. See Colin Clarke, *River of Dissolution: D. H. Lawrence*

and English Romanticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). *Women in Love* and decadence is discussed in Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, 138–47.

30. Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997). See also Scott Freer, *Modernist Mythopoeia: The Twilight of the Gods* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2015); and Bell, "D. H. Lawrence, Philosophy and the Novel," 68.

31. See Michael Bell and Peter Poellner, eds., *Myth and the Making of Modernity: The Problem of Grounding in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), esp. Bell's introduction, 1–8.

32. Yisrael Levin, *Swinburne's Apollo: Myth, Faith, and Victorian Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2016), 154.

33. Murfin, *Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence*, 159.

34. Nick Freeman, "'Nothing of the Wild Wood'? Pan, Paganism and Spiritual Confusion in E. F. Benson's 'The Man Who Went Too Far,'" *Literature and Theology* 19, no. 1 (2005): 22.

35. Roslyn Jolly, "Nympholepsy, Mythopoesis, and John Addington Symonds," *Victorian Review* 34, no. 2 (2008): 149.

36. John Addington Symonds, *Sketches in Italy and Greece* (London: Smith, Elder, 1874), 7, 6.

37. Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure and Other Essays* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891), 45.

38. Jerome J. McGann, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1972), 185–90.

39. See Levin, *Swinburne's Apollo*, 131–54.

40. Swinburne, "A Nympholept," in *Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 6:134, lines 138–40.

41. Swinburne, "Nympholept," 134, line 146.

42. Swinburne, "Nympholept," 134, line 147.

43. Swinburne, "Nympholept," 137, line 190.

44. Swinburne, "Nympholept," 138, line 215.

45. Swinburne, "Nympholept," 138, lines 216–17.

46. Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001), 218.

47. Swinburne, "Nympholept," 139–40, lines 253–59.

48. D. H. Lawrence, "Pan in America," in *Mornings in Mexico and Other Essays*, ed. Virginia Crosswhite Hyde (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 169–73. For the difficulties that arise in fixing its date of composition, see xlvii–xlix, xvi.

49. Lawrence, "Pan in America," 155.

50. Lawrence, "Pan in America," 157.

51. D. H. Lawrence, "Pan in America" [earlier version], in *Mornings in Mexico and*

Other Essays, 201. Angle brackets denote a deletion by Lawrence in manuscript; curly brackets denote a revision by Lawrence in manuscript.

52. In "Pan in America" Lawrence had a specific tree in mind, the ponderosa pine that is just outside the main cabin on the ranch—he wrote seated with his back against it. It was later the subject of Georgia O'Keeffe's painting *The Lawrence Tree* (1929).

53. See Frances Carey et al., *Painting Norway: Nikolai Astrup, 1880–1928* (London: Scala, 2016), 15, 138–41, 189.

54. The libretto by Joseph Gregor draws on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *The Bacchae* of Euripides.

55. Lawrence, *St. Mawr and Other Stories*, xi, xxiv–xxix.

56. Lawrence, *St. Mawr and Other Stories*, 67.

57. Lawrence, *St. Mawr and Other Stories*, 155.

58. D. H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent*, ed. L. D. Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 311, 312.

59. Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being*, 166.

60. D. H. Lawrence, *Quetzalcoatl*, ed. N. H. Reeve (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 307–8.

61. Lawrence, *Plumed Serpent*, 443–44.

62. D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover and A Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover,"* ed. Michael Squires (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 300.

63. Peter Fjågesund, "D. H. Lawrence, Knut Hamsun and Pan," *English Studies* 72, no. 5 (1991): 421–25; Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 46.

64. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 136.

65. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 138.

66. The quotation, from Swinburne's "The Pilgrims," lines 6–7 from *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), has an omission: ". . . nor eyes, nor lips, nor . . ."; *Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 2:105, lines 6–7.

67. D. H. Lawrence, *The Virgin and the Gipsy and Other Stories*, ed. Michael Herbert, Bethan Jones, and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 36.

68. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 153.

69. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 173.

70. D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 279.

71. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 101.

72. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 202.

73. Linda Ruth Williams, *Sex in the Head: Visions of Femininity and Film in D. H. Lawrence* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1993).

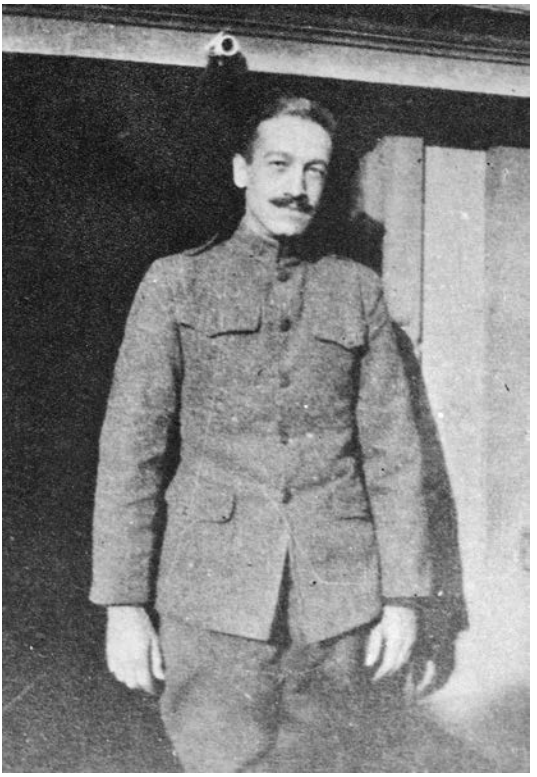
9 The Naughtiness of the Avant-Garde

Donald Evans, Claire Marie, and *Tender Buttons*

Douglas Mao

Among the bohemians making New York's Greenwich Village what it was in the 1910s, one who cut an especially striking figure was Donald Evans, a poet originally from Philadelphia whose writing and personal style performed the decadence at its most peremptory. A champion of beauty with a capital *B*, he wore a monocle and drank absinthe, by some accounts, and was given to provocative pronouncements in the Wildean vein, telling one correspondent in 1913 that a new poem of his was "the cleverest thing done since the Pyramids were built and I'm in awe of myself at having written it."[1] His first book of poetry, *Discords*, appeared in 1912; it was followed in 1914 by his most discussed collection, *Sonnets from the Patagonian*, and then by *Two Deaths in the Bronx* (1916), *Nine Poems from a Valetudinarium* (1916), and *Ironica* (1919). From 1917 to 1919, Evans served in the army, and for a republication of *Sonnets* in 1918, he furnished an "advertisement" in which he wrote, "If we could purge ourselves of our fear of Germany we should capture Berlin. Could I enlist a Battalion of Irreproachables, whose uniforms should be walking suit, top hat and pumps, and their only weapon an ebony stick, and sail tomorrow, we should march down Unter den Linden in a month, provided wrapped in our kerchiefs we carried the Gospel of Beauty, and a nonchalance in the knot of our cravats."[2]

Evans appears to have taken his own life in 1921,[3] but he was not quite forgotten in later decades. A few months after his death, his friend Arthur Davison Ficke sought contributions for "The Donald Evans Legend,"[4] and while the publication never materialized, Evans's story lingered, sometimes as a cautionary tale about how spirited poets may drift into obscurity if their talents are not fortunately deployed. In their 1946 *History of American Poetry, 1900–1940*, Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska devote a dozen pages to Evans, whom they describe as a "champion against the commercialized



Photograph of Donald Evans in uniform, Donald Evans Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University. Courtesy of the Brown University Archives.

dullness of a hypocritical morality and in revolt against the flabby sentiments of popular magazine verse," a figure who "almost brought to light a rediscovery of wit and sensibility," though "through want of poetic intelligence, taste, and character, his auguries of promise remained fragmentary and unfulfilled."[5] Evans appears here, as he does in glimpses from other accounts, as a figure of a certain pathos. He "lived a life of dull jobs, requiring long hours of hard, uncongenial labor"—writing for newspapers, especially—in spite of his "love of elegance (and one story was told of how he rented a high-ceilinged front parlor and placed, with curtains drawn, a stone sundial in it, under a glaring Mazda lamp) and of opulent gestures, borrowed from the 1890s."[6] At least one poet writing a little later would recall Evans's dandyism sympathetically: in "Thou Shalt Not Kill," his angry 1953 elegy for

many poetic dead, Kenneth Rexroth asks, "Donald Evans with his cane and / Monocle, where is he?"[7]

Apart from (and perhaps even including) his own poetry and persona, Evans's most significant achievement was his establishment of a press in 1914. Its name, Claire Marie, inevitably evokes Marguerite Audoux's *Marie-Claire*, which became a publishing sensation in France in 1910 and which carried a foreword by Octave Mirbeau, whose 1899 *Jardin des supplices* remains a classic of the decadence. But the press was more proximately named after a friend of Evans who also served as its founder and public face. A 1914 newspaper article describes Claire Marie as "the business name of Miss Claire Burke, the titian haired little actress who recently played the leading role in 'The Good Little Devil,'" and quotes her as proposing to bring out

> books for people who are tired of best sellers and the commonplace, for people who are eager for the sincerely exotic, the to-morrow of literature.
>
> The poets and dramatists I shall publish will be men and women who have no quarrel with the existing order of things, who have no wish to teach nor tear down, who are concerned only with the beauty of life.
>
> There are dozens of such writers right here in New York who are brilliant, cerebral and vivid, but their work lacks that horrible thing—popular appeal. I don't hope to make the Claire Marie books popular. I don't think I'd want to, but I think they will slowly build up a small public of their own which can be counted on for steady and adequate support.[8]

The statement clearly epitomizes a mode of self-promotion we have come to think of as constitutive of literary modernism, in which what sells the work of art is its putative unlikelihood of selling to most audiences. It evokes Lawrence Rainey's well-known characterization of modernism as, "among other things, . . . a strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits its commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes a commodity of a special sort, one that is temporarily exempted from the exigencies of immediate consumption prevalent within the larger cultural economy."[9]

Claire Marie published six books before it shuttered in September 1914. Five of them, taken together, rehearse almost too perfectly the spectrum of decadent modes and motifs.[10] *Little Wax Candle*, a farce by Louise Norton, features an affluent couple more or less wisely coming to terms with adultery in a bedroom at once baroque and *moderne*. *The Convolvulus*, by her husband Allen, unblushingly redoes *The Importance of Being Earnest* for Gramercy Park, while *Saloon Sonnets: with Sunday Flutings*, also by Allen Norton,

mixes paeans to Donald Evans with comments on "Modern Love" ("my heart fills with flowers of fantasy / That we be one, we four in extreme things")[11] and the wish that the author could, even for a moment, have touched the divine Wilde's hem. Mitchell S. Buck's *Syrinx: Pastels of Hellas* supplies what its title promises, prose poems on ancient Greece as it could only have been imagined by 1890s England, or the revenant nineties of New York two decades later ("To the Aphrodite": "Thy lips which seem so beautiful are white and hard, while mine are like red poppies, tremulous and sweet").[12] Evans's own *Sonnets from the Patagonian* runs the table of decadent accoutrements from "mauve vows" and sins cradled "with a figleaf fan" to flesh "lyrical and sweet to flog" and a "torch to flash fanfaronade."[13] In the volume's two portraits of Allen Norton, the monocle receives due mention, as does the harlot's house.[14]

Tethered to fin-de-siècle styles though Evans and the Claire Marie imprint were, they also moved amid the ferment of what we would now call American modernism. Ficke's list of possible contributors to "The Donald Evans Legend" includes not only the Nortons but also Wallace Stevens, Carl Van Vechten, Alfred Kreymborg, Gertrude Stein, Mabel Dodge, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, Gilbert Seldes, and Edna St. Vincent Millay (not to mention Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Lord Alfred Douglas, Vachel Lindsay, and John Cowper Powys).[15] Connections between Evans and Stevens have been especially highlighted by scholars: as Robert Buttel, Glen MacLeod, and others have noted, the nineties-style dandyism of Stevens's earliest poetry is traceable in part to Evans, with whom Stevens briefly considered coauthoring a book of one-line poems.[16] Already in 1930, Kreymborg saw Stevens's celebrated 1918 poem "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" as taking inspiration from the second Norton portrait, "En Monocle,"[17] and comparisons between Evans and Stevens have since been made by a number of critics, ranging from Gregory and Zaturenska to Paul Mariani.[18]

Scholars have also attended to Evans's interchange with the other "Patagonians"—a term that MacLeod applied to Evans, the Nortons, and Van Vechten. In 1915, with funding from Walter Arensberg, the Nortons published the little magazine *Rogue*, now remembered as a crucible of modernism for contributions from the likes of Stevens, Stein, Van Vechten, Djuna Barnes, and Mina Loy. As Deborah Longworth notes in an essential essay on that short-lived periodical, the Patagonians "combined the self-conscious artifice, stylistic ornamentalism, and erotic innuendo of literary Decadence, with a carefree irreverence and smart sophistication that spoke young and

modern New York as much as it did *fin de siècle/fin du globe* of 1890s London."[19] For Evans, this smartness of self-presentation was by no means grounded in material affluence, but a key part of his legend was the élan Longworth describes, well exhibited in his "cleverest thing done since the Pyramids."

The recipient of the note containing that phrase was none other than Van Vechten, also the dedicatee of the *Sonnets* and the subject of two poems in the volume. The book's opening entry, "Love in Patagonia," first recalls how "the Fania"—the actress Fania Marinoff, who married Van Vechten in 1914—"forgetting her mauve vows . . . fled, / Taking away her moonlight scarves," but goes on to assert that Van Vechten makes up this temporarily devastating absence. "Then Carlo came; he shone like a new sin," and the speaker is persuaded that his "bleeding heart would not be scarred."[20] A portrait of Van Vechten appearing later in the volume begins, "He polished snubs till they were regnant art, / Curling their shameless toilets round the hour."[21] Van Vechten would return the compliment, in the April 1915 *Rogue*, with the short narrative "How Donald Dedicated His Poem," in which Evans is portrayed as comically pledging the same poem to fourteen friends he encounters over the course of two days. There were even plans for Claire Marie to release a volume by Van Vechten called "Sacral Dimples: A Diary,"[22] and though the book never materialized, Van Vechten alludes to its prospect in a letter to Stein. He adds, "The Post-decadents are not very active at present."[23]

Markedly different from the others was the remaining volume Claire Marie published: Stein's own *Tender Buttons*. How Stein came to publish with Evans has been recounted by several of those involved, including Stein herself in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Writing in Toklas's voice, Stein recounts,

> How it all happened I do not at all remember but it was through Carl Van Vechten and had something to do with the Nortons, but at any rate there was a letter from Donald Evans proposing to publish three manuscripts to make a small book and would Gertrude Stein suggest a title for them. Of these three manuscripts two had been written during our first trip into Spain and Food, Rooms etcetera, immediately on our return. . . . She was awfully pleased at the idea of these three things being published, and immediately consented, and suggested the title of Tender Buttons. Donald Evans called his firm the Claire Marie and he sent over a contract just like any other contract. We took it for granted that there was a Claire Marie but there evidently was not. There were printed of this edition I

> forget whether it was seven hundred and fifty or a thousand copies but at any rate it was a very charming little book and Gertrude Stein was enormously pleased.[24]

Communications to Stein regarding the prospective volume—to be found in the Stein Papers at Yale's Beinecke Library—are signed "Claire Marie," but the hand notably resembles Evans's. And both the 18 March 1914 publishing agreement for *Tender Buttons* and a note from the publisher to Stein of 26 March 1915 are signed "Donald Evans," though the former also contains the inscription "Claire Marie" above the official signature line.[25]

Even as Van Vechten was encouraging Stein to publish with Claire Marie,[26] another friend was warning her against it. Mabel Dodge sounded her first alarm in a telegram of 15 March: "WOULD COUNSEL HESITATION BEFORE PUBLISHING WITH EVANS IS GETTING NAME OF SECOND RATE AND DECADENT."[27] She would enlarge on the point in a letter of two weeks later:

> About your stuff. I cabled you *not* to publish with D. Evans after having a long talk with E. A. Robinson who is our "dark poet" here, & who knows more about things than most people. He knows Evans & believes in his ability but he thinks the Claire Marie Press which Evans runs is absolutely third rate, & in bad odor here, being called for the most part "decadent" & Broadwayish & that sort of thing. He wrote Evans to get out of it, to chuck it & stop getting linked up in the public "mind" with it. I think it would be a pity to publish with him *if* it will emphasize the idea in the opinion of the public, that there is something degenerate & effete & decadent about the whole of the cubist movement which they *all* connect you with, because, hang it all, as long as they don't understand a thing they think all sorts of things. My feeling in this is quite strong.[28]

Dodge would continue in this vein for at least two more communications. One begins, "You will see from this notice of the third book from the Claire Marie Press how the idea of decadence is now really inseparable from its publications in the minds of the public," and it goes on to report that in a recent article the artist Kenyon Cox continued to hammer in "his old charge of the degeneration & decadence & Cubism, & your undenied relation to it in writing. . . . I don't want to hurt or bother Evans because I like him well enough but there are plenty of people to give him things to make sensations with—without his having yours."[29] On 8 May, Dodge wonders what will happen to Stein's name, "still bubbl[ing] on people's lips & in reviews & papers," when "Donald Evans brings it out again in 'canary boards with green title label'! Hutch [Hapgood] read it was going to be called 'Ten-

der Buttons' & he was very stern about it as coming from that press it would have a terrible 'implication.' "[30]

Even as Dodge was trying to steer Stein away from Evans, Evans was continuing a correspondence with Dodge that had included, earlier in the year, efforts to interest her in the Claire Marie venture and particular solicitations of help in getting Stein to publish. In a note archivally dated to January 1914, Evans writes, "I wish I could get you wildly excited about Claire Marie—I mean the importance of having a publishing house which is fearless, intelligent, aesthetic, fresh and light-hearted, and, above all, commercially successful. . . . Claire Marie, if it succeeds, means a refuge for the world's glittering ones."[31] In a letter of later that month, Evans explains that while Stein "must see" that Claire Marie would not make much of a profit publishing her plays, "there will be such a tremendous amount of fun exasperating the long-eared critics. I've dedicated myself to carefully exasperating the reviewers till I'm 40; then I'll have them so bewildered that they'll surrender and fawn upon me for the rest of my life. Am I not right?"[32] Letters of succeeding months track the progress of what would become *Tender Buttons*: on 5 April, Evans writes, "You may be interested to know that Claire Marie will publish Gertrude Stein's 'Objects: Food: Rooms' on May 1," and he lets Dodge know that she need not contribute the introduction Evans had solicited, as Stein has stipulated "that there should be no dedication, introduction, etc."[33] Dodge appears to have offered some form of praise when the book issued, with Evans telling her in May or June, "I'm glad you like my work on Gertrude Stein. The reviews are too amusing. I shall send her some of them."[34]

Dodge's warnings to Stein, if not Evans's communications to Dodge, are by now part of the secondary literature on modernism: they have been cited by several scholars, including Longworth in her piece on *Rogue* and Victoria Kingham in an essay appearing near Longworth's in the *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*.[35] But was Dodge likely correct about readerly understandings? What would the reader of 1914 who happened to peruse all of Claire Marie's offerings—someone, say, "tired of best sellers and the commonplace . . . eager for the sincerely exotic, the to-morrow of literature"—actually have made of *Tender Buttons* as compared to *Sonnets from the Patagonian*, *Little Wax Candle*, and the other books published by that press?

It seems hard to believe that an attentive reader would fail to observe a sharp difference between Stein's book and the rest. Whether or not such a

reader would have seen "the to-morrow of literature" more dramatically in evidence in Stein, she would surely have observed that where the other five Claire Marie books were doing things in vogue since the heyday of the *Yellow Book*, Stein, however inexplicable, was not evidently poaching from decadent preserves. Differing from the others not only in content and overall style but also in tone, *Tender Buttons* contains no foregrounded decadent motifs and exudes, at least at the level of the individual paragraph, little of decadent literature's exuberance. Consider the following examples from other Claire Marie books:

> Drinking his white absinthe like dish-water,
> Angry with no man and a-top them all
> He rolls forever a clandestine ball
> Of moss and music and forgetful myrrh—
> Which makes of men an army on his track
> To shout his colors and the arch cravat
> That maddens like the moon, and once looked at
> The moral soldier faints and turns his back.[36]

> How soft this couch of thine! Beneath my tingling nudity, its glowing silken covers scarcely seem to bear me up.[37]

> NANCY: The question between you and me, Mike, has nothing to do with the world's sheep morality. Faithfulness, unfaithfulness—the cant of bigots! Adultery, I hold, is neither good nor evil; a God could not generalize on matters of passion; passion is eternally individual.[38]

> GLORIA [to her sister Jane, respecting their soon-to-be husbands, who are brothers]: The two dears look absolutely alike, and when you get tired of yours we might change them around a bit.[39]

After this, *Tender Buttons* feels downright buttoned-up. It eschews the pointedly frolicsome, the importunately clever, the overbearingly witty, and, above all, the aggressively louche. Composed almost wholly of declarative sentences (and with even its questions made more declarative by the substitution of the period for the question mark), Stein's volume can indeed feel—apart from the apparent flirtation with nonsense that grounds its overall project—breathtakingly sober:

> The perfect way is to accustom the thing to have a lining and the shape of a ribbon and to be solid, quite solid in standing and to use heaviness in morning.[40]

> The stamp that is not only torn but also fitting is not any symbol. It suggests nothing. A sack that has no opening suggests more and the loss is not commensurate.[41]

With the comparative tonal sobriety, even austerity, of *Tender Buttons* in mind, we can perhaps better appreciate Dodge's reservations. When she worries that the book and the cubist movement generally will be received as "degenerate & effete & decadent," she clearly has in mind the consequences of the 1913 Armory Show, critical reactions to which sowed both a widespread interest in the new art and a suspicion of its degeneracy. For Dodge, such a verdict might have seemed unfair not least because the qualities of both *Tender Buttons* and cubism proper—flatness in several senses, exactingly dry humor, severely attenuated evocations of sexuality—stood at such a distance from decadent timbres and topoi. It would seem hard to disagree with Jerome McGann's verdict, in *Black Riders*, that *Tender Buttons* does not "display remarkable connections with the other works bearing the Claire Marie imprint."[42]

Yet contemporary reviews of Stein and Evans often treated *Tender Buttons* less as a sharp departure from its Claire Marie kindred, the product of an utterly different sensibility or movement, than as a further pushing of boundaries tested by *Sonnets from the Patagonian*. Robert Emons Rogers begins an 11 July 1914 review for the *Boston Transcript* entitled "New Outbreaks of Futurism: 'Tender Buttons,' Curious Experiment of Gertrude Stein in Literary Anarchy" by reporting that there is "in New York a new publishing company called simply the 'Claire Marie,' which issues occasionally slender books bound in pale blues and greens, oranges and light lemons. The titles are, for instance, 'Sonnets from the Patagonian,' 'Saloon Sonnets and Sunday Flutings,' 'Sacral Dimples' and 'The Piety of Fans.' These seem mad, but there is one which seems madder. It is 'Tender Buttons' by Gertrude Stein."[43] The opening may portend mockery, but Rogers soon changes course. He explains that Stein's "writings seem to try to do for the art of literature what has already been done in painting, sculpture and music, that is, to express anarchy in art," and, after allowing that she may be received as "either a colossal charlatan or mad," reveals her to be a doctor of medicine and philosophy for whom William James "prophesied a brilliant future." He goes on to describe her as "widely known in Europe and one of the foci of the futurist circles in Paris," a writer who had "already done work thought remarkable, in the more usual fields of literary expression, before she turned to her 'new manner.'"[44]

In fact, Rogers was in league with Stein's supporters. In a letter of 8 July 1914 from Provincetown, Dodge tells Stein, "A friend has been staying with us here—Robert Rogers—& he has just written an article for 'Boston Transcript' about yr book, etc. called 'Anarchy in Art'—I have given him your address & he will forward you a copy."[45] Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Rogers's knowledge of Dodge's set, his review returns to Evans at its close. The "other people published by the Claire Marie press are much simpler" than Stein, being "at least understandable," he notes, and Evans "tries to do nothing so revolutionary. . . . The reader knows what each line of his poems means even if the effect of the whole is a little pyrotechnic." He goes on to say that Evans "and his school are . . . in many ways avowed disciples of Oscar Wilde," though on the evidence of their resistance to "the prosing, the bald enumerations to which Ezra Pound and his 'Imagistes' pin their faith," they are also influenced by "some of the modern French schools."[46]

And yet if "Evans is less ruthless than Miss Stein," both are "anarchists in literature, striving to break away from the laws which have hitherto bound—and supported—it." So that to "understand them or to approach their point of view is not possible if one considers them as separate and unrelated. They relate to each other, and not less to the men who are doing the same thing in sculpture, painting and music. They are part of a movement which is mightily interesting Europe, has touched the artistic fringe of New York and seems quite unheard of in Boston."[47] Do Stein and Evans differ in kind, then, or only in degree? Well, yes. For Rogers, it both does and does not matter that in Europe Evans's manner had been cutting-edge a decade or two before; like Stein, Evans is trying "to break way from the laws which have hitherto bound" literature. Comparative regularity of form means that *Sonnets from the Patagonian* is less radical than *Tender Buttons*, but it remains a real effort at freedom, perhaps thanks to the flirtation with sexual lawlessness that it shares with other Claire Marie books.

Van Vechten would similarly link Stein and Evans in his contribution to *The Trend* of the following month, "How to Read Gertrude Stein." Asserting that how "not to say a thing" has been "the problem of our writers from the earliest times," he credits Evans with recognizing that English is "a language of hypocrisy and evasion" and accounts him "almost the first of the poets in English to say unsuspected and revolting things, because he so cleverly avoids saying them." *Almost* the first, because Stein "discovered the method before" him, and in fact "his *Patagonian Sonnets* were an offshoot of her late manner."[48] Another review, having quoted the Patagonian sonnet "Her Smile,"

asks, "One may discourse of influences, one may follow the trails of Jules Laforgue and Gertrude Stein, but to what good?" before commending the poems for offering "a finely ironic, a grimly jaunty criticism of life."[49] MacLeod endorses the theory of Stein's influence in his own much later account of the Patagonians, contrasting a poem from Evans's first volume, *Discords*, with a poem from *Sonnets* to show how Evans's style is "radically transformed" in the wake of Stein. Evans retains his Francophilia and "sexual passion," according to MacLeod, but now favors idiosyncratic diction over archaic and eschews "hackneyed phrasing" for "strange conjunctions of words."[50] Evans himself seems to confirm the influence in a letter of 13 August 1913 to Dodge: "The Michael Peter Norton sonnet, I think, is worthy in half manner of Gertrude Stein. Do you?"[51]

Rogers, Van Vechten, and the writer who found the *Sonnets* grimly jaunty were not alone among period commentators in representing Evans as a meeting point of decadence and other new directions in art. Indeed, one of the remarkable features of the reviews collected in the Evans Papers at Brown and Harvard (clippings at the former, retypings of the same at the latter) is the number that describe him as a cubist or futurist—where the latter term suggests less some particular debt to F. T. Marinetti and the Italian futurists than a general orientation to the future in poetry. Consider, for example, an archly skeptical piece for the New York *Morning Telegraph* bearing the headlines "AND NOW A CUBIST POET SINGS SYMBOLIC SONG. / Donald Evans Just Rhapsodizes Over 'Lyrical Flesh' and 'Mauve Vows.' / 'HE SHONE LIKE A NEW SIN.'" Its author, Leola Leonard, begins,

> Along the boulevard of Art, with a capital, a cubist Oscar Wilde comes dancing, clad only, as far as can be gleaned from his opening stanza, in a pair of shoes for which he had separated himself from two hundred francs.
>
> His name is Donald Evans, his book is called 'Sonnets From the Pategonian [*sic*],' and his publisher is Claire Marie, whose name suggests anything but belles-lettres—a modiste's bill, a Verlaine poem, a corset shop, or eke an ice.

Leonard goes on to declare that the first quatrain in Evans's "Portrait of Michael Peter"—the sonnet Evans himself marks as Steinian in his letter to Dodge—"out-Steins the helpful Gertrude in its lucidity" and concludes that "a new epitaph is submitted to the Oscar Wilde estate: 'He could save himself, but imitators he could not save.'"[52]

Leonard appears to hold Wilde in higher esteem than she holds Evans or the cubists,[53] but is a cubist Wilde in her view a stylistic modification, a

THE MORNING TELEGRAPH, SUNDAY,

AND NOW A CUBIST POET SINGS SYMBOLIC SONG

Donald Evans Just Rhapsodizes Over "Lyrical Flesh" and "Mauve Vows."

"HE SHONE LIKE A NEW SIN"

This Line Might Do for a Review of "Sonnets From the Pategonian." "Beautifully Printed."

By LEOLA LEONARD.

Along the boulevard of Art, with a capital, a cubist Oscar Wilde comes dancing, clad only, as far as can be gleaned from his opening stanza, in a pair of shoes for which he had separated himself from two hundred francs.

His name is Donald Evans, his book is called "Sonnets From the Pategonian," and his publisher is Claire Marie, whose name suggests anything but belles-lettres—a modiste's bill, a Verlaine poem, a corset shop, or eke an ice.

We know nothing of Donald Evans. We know that Claire Marie's real name is Claire Burke; that she is an actress who used to be with "The Good Little Devil"; that she has studied the printing art and gone into the publishing business. We suspect that she seceded in "Sonnets From the Pategonian," the first book to come from her press, all the finance that fans about a freak. (Having just perused the volume it is difficult to refrain from imitating its style now and then.) Claire Marie's only comment on the book in the letter that accompanied it is that it is "a nice piece of printing." That lets her out.

As for the meaning of "Sonnets From the Pategonian"—well, that is something else again. Like Leon Errol's identity in the last and well-known "Follies," it has to be worked out.

"The Pategonian" may be an apartment house—it sounds like one. The author has subtitled it "The Street of Little Hotels," a phrase of subtle ambiguity. The Sunday editor remembers from the eclectic series that Patagonian gentlemen are extremely tall. Therefore Pategonian love is the tallest love there is.

One word more before ringing up the curtain on the real show. The sonnets are a series of portraits of and dedications to the author's friends, including himself.

CLAIRE BURKE.
Whose Row as a Publisher Breaks All Previous Records.

Those honored with dedications are Carl Van Vechten and Louis Sherwin, both of critical precocity; Mabel Dodge (Mrs. Edwin, No. 23 Fifth avenue) of post-impression and I. W. W. fame; Gertrude Stein, cubistic cicerone; Allen and Louise Norton; Claire Burke, J. B. Crandall, Fania Marinoff and the author himself.

The portrait subjects are Mabel Dodge, Carl Van Vechten, Louise Norton, Allen Norton, Madame Hyssain, Michael Peter, Donovan Blades and Fan Fan. Now for sample one:

LOVE IN PATAGONIA.

Forgetting her mauve vows the Paris fled,
Taking away her moonlight scarves with her—
There was no joy left in the calendar,
And life was just an orchid that was dead.
Even our pious peacocks went unfed—
I had deserved no treachery like this,
For I had bitten sharp kiss after kiss
Devoutly, till her sleek young body bled.

Then Carlo came; he shone like a new sin—
Straightway I knew pearl-powder still was sweet,
And that my bleeding heart would not be scarred.
I sought a shop where shoes were sold within,
And for two hundred francs made brave my feet.
And then I danced along the boulevard!

The above sonnet is dedicated to Carl Van Vechten. Of course, every reader will instantly admit that the comparison of life to a dead orchid has that sucked-orange stuff crying for help. And it is very gratifying to feel sure that Mr. Van Vechten is not the mean creature who wouldn't feed the peacocks. We are

Leola Leonard, review of *Sonnets from the Patagonian*, by Donald Evans, *Morning Telegraph*, Donald Evans Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University. Courtesy of the Brown University Archives.

contradiction in terms, or simply an unattractive fact? The rest of the article offers no clear indication, but it does illustrate the point that many reviews and notices of Evans at once distinguish futurism from decadence and present the two as intertwined, either because they converge in Evans or because they undertake a common project of shocking and unsettling. A review of 1916's *Two Deaths in the Bronx* in the London *Nation*, for example, hazards

that Evans is perhaps "accounted a desperate fellow in America," that "fresh and ingenuous land" whose "fatality" it is "to be pricked, shocked, and stimulated by the sensations which do not arouse so much as a wink from us jaded Europeans. There is something childlike, verdant and captivating about a country which will still shudder, for instance, at the invasion of futuristic buccaneers. . . . [Mr. Evans] is the happiest blend of the free-verse-cum-Futuristic clan, of the green-water (colored by absinthe) school and of the Yellow Book—the whole sauced by a sardonic criticism of life, sordidly and entrancingly vicious."[54] The syntax of the last sentence is notable: strictly speaking, the second phrase beginning "of the" suggests not addition to the first but equivalence, which results in a blurring of the distinction between free verse and futurism, on the one hand, and absinthe and the *Yellow Book*, on the other. A less generous review of *Two Deaths* performs a similar blending in describing the volume as "a series of falsetto poems, full of strained attitudinizing, the dregs of revolt, the left-overs of Gertrude Stein and (incredible as it may seem these red days) the Yellow Book."[55]

Two Deaths could, then, be seen as prolonging both the nineties manner and that of Stein and the futurists—the latter nearly as out of date as the former in 1916. Announcements and reviews of Evans's other book of that year, *Nine Poems from a Valetudinarium*, no less instructively describe Evans as leaving both modes behind. They report that where critics once saw in Evans's works "great futurism or great depravity,"[56] the "arch-attitudinist, the maker of glittering and feverishly adroit phrases" has suddenly become "unaffected and humble, deserting the melodrama of Futurism and returning to academic prosody."[57] But this new restraint was by no means to all readers' tastes. In the March 1917 *Poetry Journal*, Edmund R. Brown complained that while in earlier days, "properly primed with long draughts of Edwin Arlington Robinson and touched off with a Gertrude Stein highball or two, Evans could be a brilliant maker of phrases," his *Nine Poems* presents the "disastrous case of a bad man gone good."[58]

This theme would then continue in reviews of Evans's volume of the following year, *Ironica*. According to the *New York Times* of 27 April 1919,

> Mr. Donald Evans is still learning a new tongue, plain English, and the results are not yet so valuable as some of the work he produced a few years ago in another idiom. He was of the 'futurist' group so much spoken of in those days before the war; his language, to be sure, was by no means so futuristic as that of Miss Gertrude Stein; she wrote in what may be the English of a thousand years hence, his

> was some centuries nearer. . . . But since then much has happened. Mr. Evans has married, has sojourned in Philadelphia, has served in the war. . . . If this be sobriety, give us rum; and let us lavish our thrift on War Savings Stamps. Mr. Evans's muse grew fat on loose verse and free companions; she is starving on a diet of rhythm and rectitude.[59]

In another review of *Ironica*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* asserts that Evans, "remembered most easily as the author of 'Sonnets From the Patagonian,' . . . still bears the title of the 'Futurist Poet,' in a day when Futurism has ceased to exist as such and has been absorbed into the general art-inheritance of the world."[60] This judgment is of particular interest because it anticipates so many later versions of the story of modernism's absorption into the artistic and critical mainstream. Where Brown and the *Times* regret what they see as Evans's relinquishing of the decadent and futurist capacity to unsettle, the *Inquirer* indicates that the latter, at least, unsettles no longer, having become a kind of treasure in the cultural storehouse.

In her essay on *Rogue*, Longworth follows Rob Sheffield in observing that, together with *Others*, the Nortons' periodical may be understood as constituting a "New York counter-movement to the style of new verse appearing in the pages of the Chicago-based *Poetry*."[61] "Drawing upon *fin-de-siècle* rhetoric and motifs with an attitude of amusement and parody," Longworth writes, *Rogue* "positioned itself within a different modernist genealogy to that of the pared down formal principles of 'classicist' modernism, one that has long been written out of the more canonical narratives of early-twentieth-century literary history."[62] As Longworth also notes, however, *Rogue* "flirted as much with Futurism and an emergent Dada as the Beardsleyesque 1890s" and in "tone and emphasis . . . mixed a keen zest for everything modern (which in the early 1910s could be variously and indiscriminately referred to under the terms 'Futurism, ' Cubism,' and 'free verse') with a good deal of Decadent rhetoric and urbane wit."[63] The reviews of Evans just quoted reinforce Longworth's account of the Patagonians, of course, even as they add a further complication in the form of Stein. While *Tender Buttons* might look pared down or even classicist when set against the luxuriance of early Stevens, Loy, or the other Claire Marie and *Rogue* authors, it could also seem scandalous by virtue of its formal novelty and, just as Dodge feared, the (Patagonian) company it kept. Meanwhile, Evans's decadent airs and sexual dissonance, passé from some perspectives, could take on a futurist charge thanks not just to his poetry's most formally Steinian moments but also to

his proximity to Stein, registered most visibly in their common publication by Claire Marie.

In addition to Evans's sexual unruliness and Stein's formal effrontery, however, there was a crucial third source of scandal attaching to both. This was the possibility that their provocations were insincere. What if these writers were out to gain notoriety and sell books by posing and posturing, even by perpetrating a hoax that could read as either a replication of the Armory Show's own chicanery or a shameful exploitation of its real originality? Exemplary of this line of response to *Tender Buttons* is a 9 August 1914 review in the *Los Angeles Times* that deems it "highly recommended to the posing class which is deliberately unintelligible in the hope of being thought elusively wise. . . . It seems to be Futurism."[64] Or as Richard Burton puts it in a piece entitled "Posing," for the 17 October 1914 *Minneapolis Bellman*, Stein, "'cubist' of literature, futurist of words, and self-advertiser of pseudo-intellectual antics," is either "unbalanced, or self-consciously a *poseur* who laughs in her sleeve at the ease with which she fools misguided enthusiasts."[65] Thus sounding a note similar to Rogers's "either a colossal charlatan or mad," Burton pursues the connection to the visual arts far less sympathetically, charging that Stein "saw the cubist and futurist and post-impressionist and the rest of the man-monkeys in art having their little day; and she said to herself: 'Why not the parallel fake in letters?'" In closing, he allows that the great prior "*poseur*, Oscar Wilde," lacked neither "brains nor literary ability. . . . But Gertrude Stein and all her works—really, we have fallen on evil days when she is possible!"[66]

Though far less widely covered than Stein, Evans was subject to similar skepticism. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* review of *Ironica* explains that although to "half his world, Mr. Evans is a genius straight from Heaven—or Avernus," to "the other half he is an almost impudent poseur, cut off from the sweets of his life by his own easy cynicism, a mountebank willing to exploit anything that shines yellow in the sunlight as the minted gold of true poetry."[67] Nor was it only reviewers who raised questions of this sort: Evans and his acquaintances did so as well. In the preface/advertisement to the 1918 edition of *Sonnets*, Evans mentions explicitly that he has been called "an incurable poseur,"[68] and in response to his solicitation for "The Donald Evans Legend," Dodge told Ficke that Evans "was always making me wonder if he was an awful poseur or not—or terribly real."[69] Certainly, Evans was not above a stunt. In a letter to Van Vechten of 27 June 1914, he reports that it has been arranged for the Browning Society of Philadelphia to attack *Sonnets from the*

Patagonian at their next meeting ("if the papers only bite") and wonders whether it "could be worked up that all the people portrayed" in the sonnets are preparing to sue him "for libel and to have the book suppressed. The suit needn't actually have to be filed. Do you suppose it could be done? Would everybody be willing—you, Mabel Dodge, Allen, Fan, Louise, Donovan [Blades], Louis [Sherwin] etc. Do you know a lawyer who let [*sic*] his name be used. You see—there really is a libel in every poem. But I calmly rejoin: 'Art is outside the libel law. Besides, my friends are suing me because I chose to do more portraits of myself than of anybody else.' "[70]

The most intimate glimpses of Evans afforded by his slender archives at Brown and Harvard suggest that while he certainly posed in the sense of wielding affectation, he did so in more or less sincere service to the cause of Art and Beauty. Entries from a diary of 1904, when he appears still to have been living with his parents in Philadelphia, portray a soul longing to escape from circumstances unpropitious for aesthetic devotion: "how my heart overflows with love for both of them," he writes in an entry of 1 April, "both mother and father are true high souls but our ideals are antipodes. . . . They have no particular love of the beautiful what I can do—if I can only get my first volume out soon it may make some difference."[71] Correspondence with Amy Lowell from fourteen years later makes the point even more plainly. In a letter of 7 June 1918 (eventually cited by several scholars), Lowell thanks Evans for the copy of the new edition of *Sonnets* he had sent her but confesses that since the "mauve joys" and "purple sins" associated with the *Yellow Book* were "the very 'latest thing' during [her] adolescent period," she "must be pardoned for finding their manner very dusty and, indeed, a good deal like a cotillion favor resurrected from a bureau drawer." She goes on to tell Evans that she thinks him better than his pose and to advise him to break the metaphorical monocle in his eye—to fight for beauty lustily and happily instead of lisping the creed of the nineties "in a kind of dying languor."[72]

In his reply of 10 June, Evans writes,

> I fancy if I had the privilege of your friendship you might not find me conspicuous for posing. My Patagonians, you must remember, is eight years old really, and America, despite the Yellow Book, rather needed something of the sort to break down the entrance doors for the young men.
>
> Because I have always been a good citizen, earning a decent living in straightforward journalism, 10-12 hrs. daily for 13 years, I have perhaps in my poetry been a little too conscious of the poet, and in an imagined need provided him

> with a shield of artificiality which he has never required. Among the intelligent I think I have ~~always~~ passed for simple, modest, unaffected, but there are so many bores and unworthy bigwigs one must meet and live with when one cannot entirely choose one's company that to keep alive it has sometimes seemed necessary to me to be a shock distributor. Nothing else has made any impression.[73]

By his own account, then, Evans learned from the *Yellow Book* and its fellows that one might need to be a shock distributor to further the cause of art (as well as one's own survival).[74] But some biographical notes among the Evans Papers at Harvard suggest that Evans also imbibed this lesson from Stein. Apparently furnished in response to Ficke's solicitation for the "Legend" volume, they cite as "very well established" the story that as a child Evans defended himself from bullies by "relat[ing] the most fantastic reasons for not caring to join in" sports and held the other boys fascinated "for hours" with his "astonishing narrations." The writer continues, "He confessed that he could see himself loom up as a world figure if he could increase the tempi as he approached maturity. It was this tendency which induced him to see the Gertrude Stein performance as a clue to quick recognition as a fantasist."[75] Evans thus admired Stein's willingness to distribute shocks for the sake of her renown, even as he also, surely, understood her enterprise as justified by a real desire to abet the advancement of art. Some of the aforementioned reviewers (and Stein too) may therefore have grasped something Dodge did not: that beneath his decadent trappings, Evans shared both Stein's broad ambitions and her views on how to realize them.

Of course, we can readily recognize these methods—transvaluations of aesthetic value that could always be dismissed as hoaxes, and which often tested the boundary between promoting the progress of the arts and simple self-promotion—as characteristic of modernist avant-gardism generally. The linked cases of Evans (who learned something about provocation from both the decadence and Stein) and Stein herself (who could be seen, as by Burton in the *Minneapolis Bellman*, as indebted to Wilde) thus reinforce a lesson modernist studies has slowly been learning, which is that modernists' anxious relation to the decadents was predicated in part on a recognition that they were extending the decadent project as much as reversing or breaking with it. However formally distinguishable modernist literary production might be from decadent—and borderline exempla such as the early Stevens make even this distinction hard to maintain—modernists look like next-stage decadents insofar as they embrace the understanding that an adamant

privileging of art (or beauty) can lead, productively, to stances the less enlightened might decry as fraudulent or mad.[76]

With these considerations in mind, we may want to ask what nomenclature would be appropriate to the form of provocation exercised by Stein, Evans, and other decadents and modernists operating on these principles. In her groundbreaking book of 2012, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, Sianne Ngai argues that the avant-garde has long depended, though it has refused to acknowledge doing so, on the minor aesthetic category we call the cute, and that this dependence is in some ways especially pronounced in avant-garde poetry. Poets, she writes, "have had a particular stake in the meaning and function of 'cute,' an aesthetic response to the diminutive, the weak, and the subordinate . . . that we might regard as particularly exemplary of the subclass of 'minor' aesthetic judgments as a whole."[77] The early twentieth-century text on which Ngai most substantially grounds this claim is *Tender Buttons*, from which she quotes several passages that point to the vulnerability of small things: "This which is so not winsome . . . and really not so dipped as dainty and really dainty, very dainty."[78]

Inspired and consequential as Ngai's proposal is—and we will take up a few of its important implications shortly—the claim that *Tender Buttons* is in fact all that cute deserves some scrutiny. Certainly, the work's title, along with its willingness to privilege a kind of attention to common objects, takes us into the territory of domestic smallness: as Ngai observes, *Tender Buttons* features "many 'little things'—a cup and saucer, a petticoat, a cushion, a shawl, a purse"—and where these are represented as hurt or in need of consolation, as they occasionally are, the reader may be tempted to "coo" or hear Stein cooing.[79] Yet to read through *Tender Buttons* is to notice that it only infrequently deploys vocabulary associated with cuteness, and that among the fifty-eight titles in "Objects" and the fifty-one in "Food," only perhaps "A LITTLE BIT OF A TUMBLER," "COLORED HATS," "A FEATHER," and "A LITTLE CALLED PAULINE" adumbrate things that might be considered cute in themselves.[80] One could argue, in fact, that the textures Ngai foregrounds are characteristic of only a relatively few passages from *Tender Buttons*, and that she somewhat questionably elides the difference between an "aesthetic of familiar 'small things' " and an aesthetic of the actually cute.[81] Reading the productions of Evans and the Nortons for contrast, one may even be tempted to ask whether the decadence was not, in general, far cuter than what we now think of as the twentieth-century avant-garde.

Whatever the relative cuteness of *Tender Buttons* and *The Convolvulus*,

however, there seems ready to hand another term that more obviously captures what Stein's volume shares with the other Claire Marie publications—and, by extension, what the decadence shares with the avant-garde in modernism. This is a term that inhabits, very precisely, the space between the cute and the louche, between the childish and the decidedly-not-for-children, and between the earnest and the less-than-sincere. We might, adapting Ngai, declare it another minor aesthetic category, or we might decide that its purview is only aesthetic in a marginal sense. But in any event, it has the literary-historical virtue of having been applied, in its adjectival form, to Stein once or twice and to the nineties more times than anyone can count.

This term is "naughty." The books Claire Marie published were rife with naughtiness, from the reiterated play on "vulva" in *The Convolvulus* to the dandiacal eroticism of *Sonnets from the Patagonian* to Allen Norton's declaration, in *Saloon Sonnets*, that he loves "the old man and the ingénue, / The rich whore and the obvious shrew."[82] Crucial for our purposes here is that naughtiness is not the same as either explicitness in sexual representation or bad behavior tout court: to be naughty by intention is to understand that one is baiting the keepers of the rule, but it is also to proceed with some faith that one's infractions will be forgiven because they must finally prove more amusing than destructive. To be naughty is not to be wicked but to stir things up in a way that promises no lasting ill consequences, as a comment on *Rogue* quoted by Longworth nicely illustrates (though it does not use "naughty" explicitly). In a piece for the *New York Sun*, Henry McBride calls *Rogue* "charmingly impertinent" and adds, "Impertinence and sauciness are as necessary to youth and youthful countries like ours as the air we breathe."[83] Where the London *Nation* review of Evans held that America was susceptible to being shocked by what was no longer shocking, McBride intimates that the young nation's literary possibility might be tied to its capacity to produce and relish provocations unlikely to hurt anyone.[84]

On the page, for the most part, *Tender Buttons* is no more naughty than it is cute, though there are evocations of the doings of naughty children—"stain[s]," "spilling," "an ink spot," broken cups, "Dirty is yellow"[85]—and some have seen the work's title as pointing to nipples, the clitoris, or the homonymic "tend her buttons."[86] Stein's volume was emphatically naughty as a cultural intervention, however, inasmuch as its ultimate goal was not to annihilate or to repel but rather to win over, in the double sense of charming and converting its reader. The book's naughtiness in this sense is attested by Stein's account of her reaction to the book's critics, which follows the pas-

sage from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* cited earlier: "There were printed of this edition I forget whether it was seven hundred and fifty or a thousand copies but at any rate it was a very charming little book and Gertrude Stein was enormously pleased, and it, as every one knows, had an enormous influence on all young writers and started off columnists in the newspapers of the whole country on their long campaign of ridicule. I must say that when the columnists are really funny, and they quite often are, Gertrude Stein chuckles and reads them aloud to me."[87]

However immanently naughty or non-naughty the text of *Tender Buttons* might be, unleashing the book on the world was, as Stein's recollection confirms, a naughty thing to do. Stein was aware that her impish practice would prompt misguided responses, and in chuckling over them she renders those responses' authors more naughty than evil and the "long campaign of ridicule" ridiculous rather than deadly. The naughty could certainly be tawdry enough, as when in *Little Wax Candle* the rakish Peter ponders seducing Chee Toy, the Chinese maid of his mistress Nancy: "Nancy is entertaining; Chee Toy is tempting. . . . Nancy is a heathen; so is Chee Toy. Oh, well, I give up and take whatever the gods send."[88] But whether crude or sophisticated, sprightly or nettling, naughtiness was unquestionably one of the tools that Stein and Evans—along with virtually every English-language modernist we continue to read—deployed in an effort to remake artistic standards and, by extension, the perspectives and practices of society at large.

In *Our Aesthetic Categories*, Ngai notes that the "affective response to weakness or powerlessness that is cuteness . . . is frequently overpowered by a second feeling—a sense of manipulation or exploitation. . . . Because the aesthetic experience of cuteness is a pleasure routinely overridden by secondary feelings of suspicion, there is arguably something weak about it anyway. It is this weakness that allows and even seems to invite what Denis Dutton calls 'the sense of cheapness . . . and the feeling of being manipulated or taken for a sucker that leads many to reject cuteness as low or shallow.'"[89] But cuteness also has some teeth. Homing in on the surprisingly violent tendencies of some cute things in art, Ngai observes that *Tender Buttons* (along with the contemporary artist Takashi Murakami's DOB series) may invite "less a fantasy of art's capacity for revenge on a society that renders it harmless, than a more modest way of imagining art's ability to transform itself into something slightly less easy to consume; or, something that, if indeed consumed, might result in 'heavy choking.'"[90] Thus it is that the cute—fanged but in some broader sense powerless, easy to dominate but

impossible to assimilate completely—has been "mobilized by the poetic avant-garde as a meditation" on its own "lack of political consequentiality," which later theorists have tied to, among other things, "the short or limited range of its actual address" and "its susceptibility . . . to being absorbed and recuperated by the cultural institutions it initially opposes."[91]

With these arguments in mind, we may begin to see naughtiness as the other face of a cuteness-naughtiness coin that proves to be one of the avant-garde's basic currencies. Whereas cuteness seems attractive but contains an undercurrent of repulsion, naughtiness presents itself as repellent while offering as its open secret that it is in fact inviting or tamable. Like cuteness in Ngai's account, naughtiness may seem to produce a "softening or weakening of . . . discrimination on the side of the subject,"[92] yet the point of deliberate naughtiness (as against deliberate wickedness) is surely to be consumable eventually—to put up, in the long run, little of the resistance to digestibility that Ngai associates with cuteness at its most refractory. Further, where naughtiness in art is genuinely reviled, the reason (as we have seen) is often that it seems associated with outrage *falsely* solicited, with posing or hoaxing. In other words, the mistrust of naughtiness is something like the inverse of the mistrust that attaches to cuteness. The suspicion is not that one is being manipulated into loving but rather that one is being manipulated into not-loving, into being scandalized when no bona fide scandal is at hand.

If naughtiness in art thus presumes a willingness to be assimilated eventually, one could, of course, argue that the naughty avant-garde is to be differentiated from a more rebellious and hence more authentic avant-garde—one committed to the ongoing disruption of bourgeois complacency, ossified convention, and the wasting and deadening status quo. Yet any tussle over the essence of the avant-garde must take into account how the term itself points to prescience as much as to opposition. As Matei Calinescu notes in his enduringly illuminating *Five Faces of Modernity*, the military provenance of "avant-garde" links it with "a sharp sense of militancy" and "praise of nonconformism" but also implies "courageous precursory exploration and . . . confidence in the final victory of *time* and immanence over traditions that try to appear as eternal, immutable, and transcendentally determined. It was modernity's own . . . reliance on the concept of progress that made possible the myth of a self-conscious and heroic avant-garde in the struggle for futurity."[93] Such an understanding of the avant-garde in fact jibes quite well with the quality of naughtiness, since the latter's implication of eventual

tamability was often, as Stein's and Evans's ambitions both attest, grounded in a conviction of art's capacity to tame its audience in the end—to accomplish, that is, the recalibration of standards with which modernist works have long been credited.

All this being said, it must be added that insofar as avant-garde naughtiness harbors a prospect of eventual reconciliation, it cannot perfectly cover the reception of *Tender Buttons* or the other Claire Marie volumes. As Ngai rightly notes, Stein's little book remains, a century after its publication, difficult to digest completely or accommodate fully, and it may be that Stein desired this effect as much as she hoped for a comprehensive recognition of the work's value. Claire Marie, meanwhile, professed to seek neither complete domestication nor eternal condemnation but rather something like enclave autonomy. Although it targeted readers eager for "the to-morrow of literature," it claimed to publish "men and women who have no quarrel with the existing order of things, who have no wish to teach nor tear down," and imagined not a widespread transformation of American audiences but "a small public . . . which can be counted on for steady and adequate support." On the evidence of its short life, it did not achieve even that, and Evans and his work eventually fell out of literary-historical memory.

Still, Stein's provocations, among which *Tender Buttons* was one of the most immediately and widely sensational, helped instigate a change of taste that ensured the longevity of her work; and if Evans and his poems faded from view, this was partly because the shocks he sought to distribute were so soon assimilated. We might say, then, that Evans's and Stein's divergent literary fates point not to different morals but to a single one: that naughtiness was integral to the avant-garde's project of transforming the way art was received, even if the transformations engendered abetted canonization in some cases and oblivion in others. How a given exercise of avant-garde naughtiness fared depended on how far the work seemed exhausted by its provocations and by the broader circumstances in which it might come to be, in the words of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1919, "absorbed into the general art-inheritance of the world." But the significance of avant-garde naughtiness was inevitably tied to the prospect of such absorption.

Notes

1. Paula L. Hart, "Donald Evans," in *American Poets, 1880–1945*, 3rd ser., ed. Peter Quartermain (Detroit: Gale, 1987). Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 54, Litera-

tureResourceCenter,go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&sw=w&u=balt85423&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CH1200001128&it=r&asid=95c023138ca73db078812081835d92d1.

2. Donald Evans, *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (Philadelphia: Nicholas L. Brown, 1918), 9.

3. In *A History of American Poetry, 1900–1940* (New York: Harcourt, 1946), Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska note that Evans died "reputedly by his own hand" (255). According to the *Allentown (PA) Morning Call* of 31 May 1921, the medical examiner in the case "returned a verdict of accidental death" by gas asphyxiation (5), but Evans was clearly distraught, in the early part of 1921, over his recent divorce from his second wife, Esther. The previous November, several newspapers reported that Esther had been charged with child neglect (apparently after an initial separation from Evans). "Phila. Poet's Wife Is Arrested in N.Y.," *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*, 25 Nov. 1920, 3, www.newspapers.com/image/162316776; "Mrs. Donald Evans Gets Babies: Quits Husband," *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*, 26 Nov. 1920, 1, www.newspapers.com/image/162316783; "Mother Regains Children She Left Alone," *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, 3 Dec. 1920, 20, www.newspapers.com/image/63989272; "A Poet Who Turned to Business and Lost a Wife," *Sandusky (OH) Star Journal*, 15 Apr. 1921, 11, www.newspapers.com/image/11332248. In a letter to Arthur Davison Ficke of 27 February 1921, Evans reports that he suffered a breakdown in the wake of his wife's "devastating neglect of the children" and the "hateful newspaper notoriety" consequent upon her having "behaved so shockingly"; he also reports having custody. Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22 (MS Am 2362), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

4. A letter from Ficke to potential contributors, as well as the responses of some of those contacted, can be found in the Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22. The project is also remarked in a report in the *Davenport (IA) Daily Times* of 24 November 1921 (10) on a visit paid by the poet Witter Bynner to Ficke and his wife, who were Davenport residents; see www.newspapers.com/image/302679021.

5. Gregory and Zaturenska, *History of American Poetry*, 256, 263.

6. Gregory and Zaturenska, *History of American Poetry*, 256.

7. Kenneth Rexroth, *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1984), 96.

8. "'Sonnets from the Patagonian' Are Furturistic [*sic*]," undated clipping from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook, Donald Evans Papers, 1904–19 (MS 94.13, box 1), Hay Manuscripts, Hay Library, Brown University. In another article on the press, Claire Marie Burke is described as having "one unvarying answer" for "those who are skeptical of commercial success for her venture": "There is the Mercure de France. Is not that a success? And I shall find just as clever writers here in America." "Actress Becomes Publisher of Books for Exotic Tastes," clipping dated 18 Jan. 1914 from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date identified

from pencil note on clipping.) In its newspaper advertising, Claire Marie presented itself as a "Publisher of Belles-Lettres for Exotic Tastes"; see, e.g., *New York Times*, 25 Jan. 1914, 58, www.newspapers.com/image/20583043.

Where not otherwise indicated, quotations from notices, reviews, and newspaper articles cited in this essay are gathered from the clippings in Donald Evans's scrapbook, which is held at Brown University, as noted above. Where the date or source periodical is not indicated in the clipping itself, the method of establishing the date or source is indicated parenthetically. Typescripts of a number of these articles and reviews (as noted below) appear in the Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

9. Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998), 3.

10. The present essay's use of "decadence" corresponds closely to that of Kristin Mahoney, who in *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015) uses it to designate "the later phase of aestheticism, the aestheticism of the 1890s," along with "figures who were linked in the cultural imagination to the fin de siècle and who . . . advertised and reinforced that sense of association between themselves and the aestheticism of the Yellow Nineties." In this essay as in Mahoney, in other words, the term is not limited to works produced in the 1890s and artists active in that decade; it extends forward, per Mahoney's central point that from the 1910s through the 1930s decadence was "at once exotic and within reach," over in one sense and yet "close enough that it might still be contacted or that its spirits might still walk the earth" (4–5).

11. Allen Norton, *Saloon Sonnets: With Sunday Flutings* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 21.

12. Mitchell S. Buck, *Syrinx: Pastels of Hellas* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 25.

13. Donald Evans, *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 11, 15, 23, 61.

14. Norton is seen "playing at solitaire" in the latter; "born with" the former, he "stares at life, / And sends his soul on pensive promenades." Evans, *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (1914), 16, 17.

15. List of "People who knew D. E.," Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

16. Glen MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Company: The Harmonium Years, 1913–1923* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 65–75; Robert Buttel, *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967), 80–93. On the Evans-Stevens collaboration, see MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Company*, 66.

17. MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Company*, 65–66; Buttel, *Wallace Stevens*, 92.

18. Paul Mariani, *The Whole Harmonium: The Life of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 71–73, 108.

19. Deborah Longworth, "The Avant-Garde in the Village," in *The Oxford Critical*

and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, vol. 2, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 468–69.

20. Evans, *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (1914), 11.

21. Evans, *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (1914), 45.

22. Edward Burns, ed., *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913–1946* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 38.

23. Burns, *Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*, 37.

24. Gertrude Stein, *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 147.

25. The communications signed Evans are dated 18 February, 18 March, 15 April, 13 June, and 25 July 1914. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, box 105, folder 2086, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

26. In "The Making of 'Tender Buttons': Gertrude Stein's Subjects, Objects, and the Illegible" (*jacket2*, 21 Apr. 2011, https://jacket2.org/article/making-tender-buttons), Joshua Schuster argues that while "Evans relished ruffling the feathers of the staid American literary reviewers," he truly published *Tender Buttons* "as an act of love for Van Vechten, to whom he had begun sending copious love letters by early 1914." Evans's letters to Van Vechten are passionate in a fin-de-siècle manner, but the depth of his romantic feeling is hard to gauge, since he used similarly effusive, if less cozily amorous, language on other correspondents such as Dodge and Marinoff. In a typed card dated 13 February 1955 that accompanies his file of correspondence from Evans, Van Vechten opines, "These florid, arty letters (of a kind he wrote many others) are really WRITTEN to himself." Carl Van Vechten Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, box 42, folder 579. Schuster notes that Evans may well have had a decisive hand in shaping the received text of *Tender Buttons*: "All evidence points to Evans as the one who put" the "Objects" section first (ahead of "Food" and "Rooms"), and "Stein did not complain or demand any different ordering of the sections in any future reprint. For a writer who stressed exactitude and faithful reproduction of her work, this rather significant editorial contribution made an impact that Stein might not have foreseen, as it turned 'Objects' into the center of attention and effectively made the other sections into secondary works."

27. Quoted in Burns, *Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*, 25n2; also quoted in Longworth, "Avant-Garde in the Village," 469. The Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers at Yale hold the original cablegram: "Would counsel hesitation before publishing with evans is getting name of second rate and decadant [*sic*]." Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, box 115, folder 2400.

28. Mabel Dodge to Gertrude Stein, 29 Mar. 1914, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, box 115, folder 2400. Also quoted in James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 178–79.

29. Mabel Dodge to Gertrude Stein, 1914, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, box 115, folder 2400.

30. Dodge continues: "I suppose you are guided by your star in these matters but I wish I hadn't spend [*sic*] all I had in that cable to you. And you never told me why or what or anything! Evans is certainly as promising a word slinger as anyone over here—but even then! He's amusing too." Mabel Dodge to Gertrude Stein, 8 May 1914, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, box 115, folder 2400.

31. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 11, folder 319, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

32. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 11, folder 319.

33. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 11, folder 319.

34. Evans also attempted to interest Dodge in a role in a production of *The Convolvulus*: "Now, on my knees, I beg for your interest in the production. I want you to play one of the roles, only you can play it. . . . The comedy is sheer madness, captivating and amazing. It leaves Gertrude Stein a very illuminating person." Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 11, folder 319. This letter bears an archivist's hazarded pencil date of June 1913, but 1914 seems more likely, given that Evans was similarly trying to interest Van Vechten in a role in the play in summer of that year. A missive dated 10 July (clearly 1914), in Evans's own hand and on the same *New York Times* stationery used in the plea to Dodge, beseeches Van Vechten, "You will play Peter in 'The Convolvulus,' won't you? You will insure the play's success." Carl Van Vechten Papers, box 42, folder 580.

35. Longworth quotes Dodge's telegram and 29 March letter to Stein; "Avant-Garde in the Village," 469. In her essay on *The Seven Arts*, *The Trend*, and *The Soil*, Kingham quotes the letter and observes that Dodge advised Stein to place *Tender Buttons* with *The Soil*, in spite of its publisher's "apparently negligent financial management." Victoria Kingham, "'Audacious Modernity': *The Seven Arts* (1916–17); *The Soil* (1916–17); and *The Trend* (1911–15)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (New York: Oxford UP, 2012), 418. In *Charmed Circle*, Mellow speculates that Dodge's first letter, preceded by a telegram and with its "perhaps fatal proprietary manner," may have helped precipitate the cooling of the Dodge-Stein relationship (178).

36. Norton, "Donald Evans: His Tie," in *Saloon Sonnets*, 20.

37. Buck, *Syrinx*, 27; ellipses in the original.

38. Louise Norton, *Little Wax Candle* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 31.

39. Allen Norton, *The Convolvulus* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 44.

40. Stein, *Selected Writings*, 464.

41. Stein, *Selected Writings*, 501.

42. Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993), 19.

43. Robert Emons Rogers, "New Outbreaks of Futurism," *Boston Evening Tran-*

script, 11 July 1914, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date and source identified from quotation of article in Karen Leick, *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity* [New York: Routledge, 2009], 45.)

44. Rogers, "New Outbreaks of Futurism."

45. Mabel Dodge to Gertrude Stein, 8 July 1914, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, box 115, folder 2400.

46. Rogers, "New Outbreaks of Futurism."

47. Rogers, "New Outbreaks of Futurism."

48. Carl Van Vechten, "How to Read Gertrude Stein," in *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*, ed. Kirk Curnutt (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000), 154–55.

49. Undated clipping from unidentified source, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (The clipping does include a page number, 575, and part of a running head, "Some Recent American Poetry.")

50. MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Company*, 9.

51. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 11, folder 319.

52. Leola Leonard, "And Now a Cubist Poet Sings Symbolic Song," undated clipping from New York *Morning Telegraph*, Donald Evans Scrapbook. Typescript of same in Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22. Leonard quotes the Peter portrait accurately: "There is what is and what there is is fair, / But most is yet to come to what is here; / Here is the most to come from out a year, / For from the year there comes all there is there." Evans, *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (1914), 31.

53. Listing the subjects of Evans's portraits, Leonard calls Stein a "cubistic cicerone" and describes Mabel Dodge as "of post-impression and I. W. W. fame"; she adds that from one portrait we learn of Dodge that, "cubistically speaking, she stroked her ears with hands that were too white." Leonard, "And Now a Cubist Poet."

54. "The Unacknowledged Legislators," undated clipping from the London *Nation*, Donald Evans Scrapbook. This comment is subsequently quoted in two reviews appearing in Evans's scrapbook: W. S. B., "Poems of a Valetudinarian," undated clipping from unidentified newspaper; and "Futuristic Buccaneers," undated clipping from unidentified newspaper. The London *Nation* review is also quoted in "A Solemn Johnny Bull," *Pittsburgh Post*, 29 Aug. 1916, 6, www.newspapers.com/image/86801550; and by Gregory and Zaturenska in their *History of American Poetry*, 259.

55. Undated clipping from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook. Other notices of the era—many of them likely cribbing phrases from other sources, including Evans's own announcements and brochures—more succinctly dub Evans a futurist. A notice of the imminent publication of *Two Deaths* refers to Evans as "the Futurist poet" and to *Sonnets from the Patagonian* as "the first Futurist volume published in America." "New Books and Their Writers," undated clipping from *Philadelphia Evening Telegraph* 105, no. 55, Donald Evans Scrapbook. Typescript of same in Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22. A review of the 1916 volume calls Evans and his "school" the " 'futurists' of poetry" and,

having quoted some of Evans's lines, explains that one can ferret out a thought from them, with effort, just as one can find an idea even "in the most violent of the modernist paintings." "Light and Shade in Current Verse and Drama," undated clipping from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook. Evans is again named "arch futurist" in a review of Michael Strange's *Miscellaneous Poems* from roughly the same moment. "Why Is Futurism," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 20 Jan. 1917, 7, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date and source identified from www.newspapers.com/image/87684273.)

Evans does not seem to have been averse to the futurist label. At one point he offered fifty dollars for the retrieval of his manuscript of *Two Deaths*, which he claimed to have lost; the subtitle of a New York *Morning Telegraph* article reporting the reward is "FUTURIST LAMENT IN AN AD." "Poet Offers $50 for Lost Verses," *Morning Telegraph* (New York), 2 Jan. [1916?], Donald Evans Scrapbook. Another clipping, apparently from 1916, carries a picture of Evans, "futurist poet of Philadelphia," as a child. "Early Days," undated clipping from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook. A notice of the 1918 republication of *Sonnets* ("Notable Reprint of Futurist Classic," perhaps penned by Evans) explains that the "book was a cerebral bombshell dropped in our unsuspecting midst a few years ago" that "let loose an irreverent pack of stimulating Futurist devils that are still stirring things up among us." It goes on to credit Evans's 1914 collection with "open[ing] the Modernists' war against musty literary traditions," to affirm that its author's "plangent satire on sex and sanity is only now beginning to be understood in the light of his other work," and to commend his "vitreous sonnets," which, with "their irony like lemon satin . . . stray into the shadows of uncertainty—sex and personality as social evasions." Undated clipping from unidentified source, Donald Evans Scrapbook. Typescript of same in Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22. On the "Selected List in Belles-Lettres" included at the back of numerous books published by Nicholas L. Brown, the following text appears: "This book opened the Modernists' war against musty literary traditions. Printed on Japan paper. Edition limited to 750 copies. Toyogami boards, $1.50." For a representative Brown volume bearing this list, see Frank Wedekind, *The Awakening of Spring*, 6th ed. (New York: Nicholas L. Brown, 1920).

Reviewers frequently applied "modern" and associated terms to Evans as well. A review of the initial publication of *Sonnets from the Patagonian* describes the earlier *Discords* as creating "some stir among readers of ultra-modern poetry" even as it compares the new book's diction—"tortured, artificial for the love of artificiality," and Beardsleyesque—with "the most extravagant experiments of French symbolism." Review of *Sonnets from the Patagonian*, undated clipping from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook. A brief notice of 2 April 1916 calls *Two Deaths* "a collection of 'modernist' verse dealing with hectic phases of metropolitan life." "News and Reviews of the New Publications and Comment about Authors and Publishers," undated clipping from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook. And the *Pittsburgh Post* describes the poems of *Two Deaths* as "transfused by the ultra-modern

spirit." *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 15 Apr. 1916, 8, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date identified from www.newspapers.com/image/86665140.) Another review of *Two Deaths* notably associates the "modernistic" with loosened views of sexual mores: "Mr. Evans writes of a society matron 'sheer and shimmering'" whose husband takes "a very modernistic view" of her infidelities, seeming "to consider his wife's pleasure as none of his business." "Calling a Spade a Shovel," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Apr. 1916, 3.20, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date and source identified from www.newspapers.com /image/155990742.) Still in June 1919, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* was describing Evans as "an ultra modern poet." "Social Problems in Verse," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 7 June 1919, Donald Evans Scrapbook.

56. "Donald Evans Recovering," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 6 Jan. 1917, 5, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date and source identified from www.newspapers.com/image/86667735.) Typescript of same in Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

57. Review of *Nine Poems from a Valetudinarium*, undated clipping from unidentified newspaper, Donald Evans Scrapbook. The phrase "arch-attitudinist" is borrowed from Nicholas L. Brown's "Selected List in Belles-Lettres" (see n. 48), where the notice for *Nine Poems* reads, "The arch-attitudinist suddenly becomes grave and simple and writes in a mood of supreme reverence. Boards, $1.00."

58. Edmund R. Brown, review of *Nine Poems*, *Poetry Journal* 6, no. 5 (Mar. 1917): 213, clipping from Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date and source identified from *Poetry Journal*, https://books.google.com/books?id=fnwqAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA213&lpg=PA213&dq.) Typescript of same in Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

59. Review of *Ironica*, *New York Times*, 27 Apr. 1919, 240, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date and page identified from www.newspapers.com/image/20592549.)

60. "Book of the Day," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 Apr. 1919, 10, Donald Evans Scrapbook. (Date identified from stamp on clipping, page identified from www.newspapers.com/image/170706289.) Typescript of same in Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

61. Longworth, "Avant-Garde in the Village," 479.

62. Longworth, "Avant-Garde in the Village," 472. For discussions of the Chicago scene's and imagism's own ties to the decadence, see David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 1995), 175–91; and David Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States: Art and Literature against the American Grain, 1890–1926* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 2008), 86–119; along with Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015), 155–74; and Cassandra Laity, *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996).

63. Longworth, "Avant-Garde in the Village," 479–80, 486.

64. Anonymous, "Futurist Essays," in Curnutt, *Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*,

22. Leonard Diepeveen quotes some of this remark in "The Newspaper Response to *Tender Buttons*, and What It Might Mean," in *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms*, ed. Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2008), 208–9. At this point in his essay, Diepeveen helpfully considers reviewers' concerns about, in his own phrasing, Stein's "abuses of *trust*" (209).

65. Richard Burton, "Posing," in Curnutt, *Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*, 163–65.

66. Burton, "Posing," 163–65. That posing could be understood as a kind of hoax is emphasized by the title of Kreymborg's 7 March 1915 article for the New York *Morning Telegraph*, "Gertrude Stein—Hoax and Hoaxtress: A Study of the Woman Whose 'Tender Buttons' Has Furnished New York with a New Kind of Amusement" (cited in Leick, *Gertrude Stein*, 48). In the brochure that accompanied *Tender Buttons*, Claire Marie explained to reviewers that though "there are some who assert that with her tongue in her cheek [Stein] is having a joke at the expense of those who take her seriously," for "us . . . she is a real force that must be reckoned with—she cannot be ignored. . . . The effect produced on first reading is something like terror" (quoted in Leick, *Gertrude Stein*, 44). As Leick notes, this "effectively framed the debate" (44), with many reviewers of Stein's volume drawing on its language directly.

67. "Book of the Day," 10.

68. Evans, *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (1918), 11.

69. Mabel Dodge Stern to Arthur Davison Ficke, n.d., Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

70. Carl Van Vechten Papers, box 42, folder 580.

71. Donald Evans, diary 1904–5 (typescript), Donald Evans Papers, 1904–19 (MS 94.13, box 1), Hay Manuscripts, Hay Library, Brown University. Typescript of same in Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

72. Amy Lowell to Donald Evans, 7 June 1918, Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

73. Donald Evans to Amy Lowell, 10 June 1918, Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning Donald Evans, 1914–22.

74. Evans's and the other Patagonians' attempt to use the nineties to pry open the American 1910s bears comparison with the efforts of the British authors and artists Mahoney examines, who, in her words, "posited themselves as out of place and of the past" but were able to render certain "kinds of cultural critique" that a "temporally marginal position enables" (*Literature and the Politics*, 5). Their search for "an antidote to the chauvinism of wartime" (7), in particular, resonates with Evans's "advertisement" to the revised *Sonnets*, where he asserts that America, whose people have "put too much faith in materialism, and betrayed the Soul and Beauty" (9), will lose the war "unless somewhere she can find the beauty and the strength of the human soul with which to give battle" (8). For more on decadence, modernism, and the Great War, see numerous references in Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*.

75. Unsigned manuscript, Arthur Davison Ficke Collection of Papers concerning

Donald Evans, 1914–22. Penciled above this note, at the top of the page, is a parenthetical "(Mrs. Volka)," which suggests that the source of these notes, though perhaps not the person writing out these pages, could be Hélène Volka, a fashion editor. (The Houghton Library's guide to the Ficke Collection of Papers lists Volka as presumptive author.)

76. From this point of view, Peter Bürger's famous distinction between a modernism that inherits aestheticism's values and a genuine avant-garde that breaks with aestheticism is of dubious utility. Even were we to accept Bürger's effective reduction of the authentic avant-garde to Dada, we might doubt the implication that the avant-garde discards the privileging of art as a premise for its work. But there is no strong reason to accept Bürger's reduction, or his claim that the avant-gardiste's definitional intention is "to direct toward the practical the aesthetic experience . . . that Aestheticism developed. What most strongly conflicts with the means-end rationality of bourgeois society is to become life's organizing principle." Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1984), 34. To be sure, Claire Marie would seem to choose aestheticism as against avant-garde activism in claiming that its authors "have no quarrel with the existing order of things, . . . have no wish to teach nor tear down, . . . are concerned only with the beauty of life," but the distinction does not, for reasons noted here, seem to fit Evans's and Stein's larger agendas. Sianne Ngai, whose discussion of the avant-garde forms the pivot of the remainder of this essay, implicitly declines to adopt Bürger's definition of the avant-garde; Bürger receives mention only once, and in passing, in her *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), 97.

77. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 53.

78. Quoted in Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 53; see also Stein, *Selected Writings*, 485.

79. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 88.

80. Stein, *Selected Writings*, 472–73.

81. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 4.

82. Norton, *Saloon Sonnets*, 27.

83. Quoted in Longworth, "Avant-Garde in the Village," 480.

84. Longworth goes on to quote Alice Corbin Henderson's less charitable take on "Patagonianism" in the October 1914 issue of *Poetry*, which charges that its acolytes' "out-worn, very much *passé* desire to *épater le bourgeois*" materializes in an effort not "so much to shock others as to shock themselves" ("Avant-Garde in the Village," 481). For Henderson, specious wickedness saps modern energies; for McBride, America's youthful promise is bound up not with organic vitality in a Williamsian vein but with a species of naughtiness that proves the country's lifeblood.

85. Stein, *Selected Writings*, 481, 480, 471, 470, 463.

86. See David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977): "Since buttons cannot be liter-

ally tender, 'Tender Buttons' must be a metaphor. For what? Nipples have been suggested" (153). John Spalding Gatton, in an annotation on *Tender Buttons* in *Adventures of the Mind: The Memoirs of Natalie Clifford Barney* (New York: New York UP, 1992), notes that "*bouton*, the French for *button*, is argot for clitoris" (260). In *Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), Kathryn Kent adds that Stein's writing in *Tender Buttons* becomes "an explicitly sexual act" and that readers are "called to participate in this desiring experience, to 'tend her buttons' along with the poet" (151).

The word "naughty" does appear near the very end of *Tender Buttons*: "A safer weight is one more naughty in a spectacle. The best game is that which is shiny and scratching." Stein, *Selected Writings*, 508–9. Stein's game as an author was certainly a shiny and scratching one, a naughty spectacle, as Thornton Wilder would later suggest in a 7 October 1935 letter to Stein and Toklas. Of her forthcoming *Geographical History of America*, he writes, "And how jubilantly naughty of Gertrude to sail in and smash half the accepted ideas of the world and to make such havoc so gaily." *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1996), 61. Heightening Stein's effect of naughtiness (and, to be sure, her effect of cuteness as well) was her association with babydom and child-speech, which runs from the dog Baby in *Three Lives* through Wyndham Lewis's critique of Stein's baby-talk—exemplary, as he notes in his 1927 *Time and Western Man* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow, 1983), of the "malady of childhood that has mysteriously over-taken all our world" (50)—to Stein's own endearment for Alice Toklas ("Baby Precious") and Van Vechten's for Stein ("Baby Woojums"). (Ngai points to Lewis on Stein in *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 68–69 and 87.)

87. Stein, *Selected Writings*, 147–48.

88. Norton, *Little Wax Candle*, 22.

89. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 24–25.

90. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 93. The quote "heavy choking" is from *Tender Buttons*.

91. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 97.

92. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 24.

93. Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1987), 95. Calinescu notably links the decadence to the avant-garde, which "is consciously involved in furthering the 'natural' decay of traditional forms in our world of change, and does its best to intensify and dramatize all existing symptoms of decadence and exhaustion" (124). In his recent reconsideration of the relation between decadence and privilegings of progress associated with modernism, Sherry observes that "where decadence registers [a] sense of a time not renewed, or not even capable of renewal, it locates the moment of an exceptional present, which provides at once the local time and the root sense of modern*ism*"; *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, 35.

10 The Queerness of Being 1890 in 1922

Carl Van Vechten and the New Decadence

Kirsten MacLeod

> To be 1890 in 1890 might be considered almost normal. To be 1890 in 1922 might be considered almost queer. There is a difference, however. The color is magenta. Oscar's hue was green. The fun is warmer; the vice is more léger.
>
> Carl Van Vechten, introduction to Ronald Firbank's *Prancing Nigger* (1924)

Being 1890 in 1922 would certainly have been considered "queer" for modernists who deplored what Ezra Pound called the "decayed lily verbiage" of their decadent literary predecessors.[1] It was, however, more than "almost normal," not only for Ronald Firbank but for Carl Van Vechten too, as well as a host of their contemporaries who were queerly being 1890 in 1922—those Wyndham Lewis, Pound's sometime friend and ally in promoting avant-gardist forms of modernism, would denounce as "that fearful, 'sophisticated' ninetyish mob."[2] The importance of 1890s decadence to modernism has long been underestimated, overshadowed by a narrative that celebrates the 1910s and 1920s as anni mirabiles of a "make it new" oriented movement, the very newness of which was predicated on a break with the previous generation.[3] Decadence, however, was alive and well in the 1920s, much to the chagrin of writers like Pound and Lewis, for whom it represented a threat. This "new decadence," as it has been called, of writers like Firbank, Van Vechten, and others was a form of modernism engaged with and enjoyed by many.[4] It was relatively popular in contrast to the forms approved of, endorsed, and promoted by Pound. It was also, however, marketed and received as sophisticated high culture because, as Lewis complained, it had "certain literary pretensions, and a sort of highbrow equipment."[5] As such, it threatened the cultural authority of modernists who competed with these

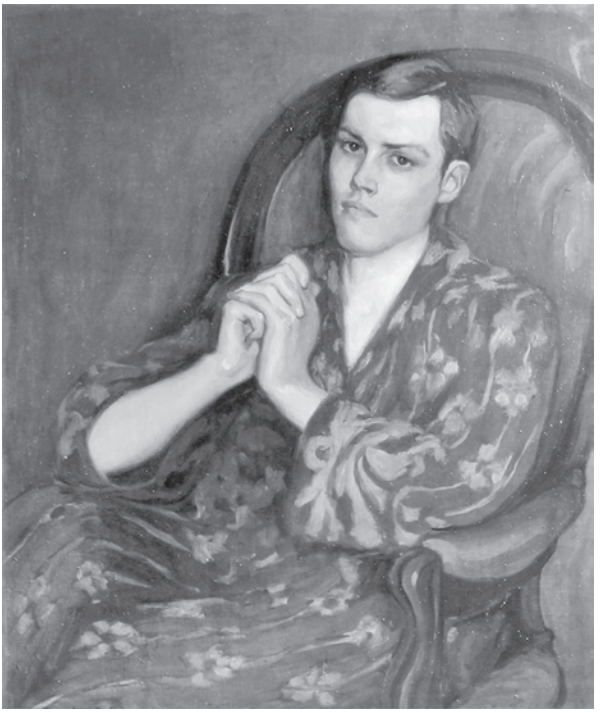
new decadents for the attention of publishers, magazine editors, booksellers, and readers. The prolific manner in which decadence circulated and was revived in the modernist literary field lent an added urgency to the impulse that Vincent Sherry has identified in ambivalent modernists who sought to suppress, repress, and disavow their debt to decadence. In the field of struggle that was the modernist literary field, decadence played a central role in the battle for cultural authority between competing modernisms. Van Vechten was at the center of the new decadence, practitioner and champion of this form of modernism that, in its cultural moment, wielded as much if not more cultural capital in the literary field than those modernisms that have come to overshadow it.

For Van Vechten, however, new decadence was more than simply an aesthetic resistance to competing forms of modernism, and the clue to its additional sociopolitical significance is signaled by the term "queer" in his comments on Firbank. In thinking about his aesthetic and cultural aims, we can understand this queerness in two senses. First, new decadence, in its nostalgic hankering for a passé literary mode over and against "make it new" forms of modernism, was queer in the sense of "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric."[6] Second, for Van Vechten and some other writers of the new decadence, there was, in addition to an aesthetic politics, a sexual politics behind the mobilization of 1890s decadence, notably as a means for writing about queerness in another sense gaining currency in this period, that is, "homosexual."[7] Indeed, the association of decadence with homosexuality and effeminacy was a key part of what made it suspect to writers such as Pound, Lewis, and T. S. Eliot in a modernist discourse that was often homophobic and misogynistic. Van Vechten, however, embraced what these modernists shunned. Ever alert to what he called, in describing Gertrude Stein's writing, the "detonation" and "connotation" of words,[8] he is surely exploiting the double meaning of "queer" in his discussion of Firbank. Indeed, the homosexual connotation is reinforced by his reference to Wilde, a figure whose name in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries connoted homosexual before that term entered common usage.[9] Though scholars frequently characterize Van Vechten as homosexual or bisexual, the term "queer," in the broader sense in which its meaning has since evolved, better accounts for his anti-essentialism and his interest in dissolving boundaries and erasing binary distinctions.[10] Indeed, Van Vechten, like the subject of his essay, Firbank, provides a telling example of how decadence comes to be queered in the twentieth century, notably in its role in the development of camp as an

aesthetic and social practice and form of cultural critique.[11] George Hutchinson, for example, has described Van Vechten as "the king of camp before anyone knew what camp was," and, though a relatively unknown figure, he is acknowledged by some queer studies scholars as a pioneer of camp.[12] Van Vechten's new decadence, then, was both a belated decadence and a kind of camp *avant la lettre*. In turn, it functioned both as a popular and viable aesthetic alternative to contemporaneous forms of modernism and as a vehicle for the articulation of not only homosexual identity but also queerness as it is now more broadly understood—an identity, as Moe Meyer argues, that asserts fluidity, performativity, and discontinuity against essentialist paradigms of sexuality and gender.[13] In drawing out these aspects of Van Vechten's new decadence, this chapter focuses largely on his second novel, *The Blind Bow-Boy* (1923), though his broader oeuvre is relevant to this subject too. *The Blind Bow-Boy* is an exemplar of what it might mean to be 1890 in 1922—a Jazz Age *Dorian Gray* that uses decadence to engage subversively with the thematics and aesthetic practices of his modernist contemporaries. At the same time, beneath its frothy surface, the novel treats more serious concerns about proscribed sexual identities and behaviors.

Carl Van Vechten and the New Decadence

Van Vechten was born in 1880 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, an inauspicious breeding ground for decadence if ever there was one. Van Vechten, however, eventually managed to find his way to it. Among a broader reading diet that included the "luck and pluck" tales of Horatio Alger, issues of *Harper's Weekly*, dime novels, and Mark Twain, Van Vechten also read Henry James, Alphonse Daudet, the *Chap-Book* (a decadent little Chicago magazine of the 1890s), and George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man*, an urtext of British decadence that left an "indelible impression" on him.[14] In 1899 Van Vechten escaped Cedar Rapids, first to attend the University of Chicago, and then to forge a journalistic career with the Hearst empire. Despite its early flowering in this period as a literary center, Chicago did not stir his soul, and he abandoned it for New York in 1906. Here, and in stints in Europe up to the war years, he found an environment suited to his developing decadent persona, one captured in a portrait of him from this period by his friend Martha Baker. Depicting a pale, ennui-ridden Van Vechten seated in an armchair in a flowered dressing gown, the painting was titled "the conscious despair of irrevocable decadence" by its owner, Mabel Dodge.[15] Upon arrival in New York, one of the first pieces he wrote was on Richard Strauss's controversial



Carl Van Vechten, painting in oil by Martha S. Baber, 1905. Courtesy of the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, Berg Collection portrait file, New York Public Library Digital Collections.

opera *Salomé*. Over the next few years, he would refine his knowledge of fin-de-siècle decadence. His notebooks of this period chart an acquaintance with a decadent canon, documenting his reading of Arthur Rimbaud, Jules Laforgue, Remy de Gourmont, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Jean Lorrain, J.-K. Huysmans, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Arthur Symons, Octave Mirbeau, Edgar Saltus, and so on.[16] In his European travels he made pilgrimages to places associated with 1890s bohemian and avant-garde culture. Further, as a literary and music critic and valued advisor to publishers, Van Vechten used his influence to promote both old decadence and its new modern practitioners.

Through his journalistic work, Van Vechten would soon make a name for himself within a number of artistic networks, in which he would become central to the development of new decadence. He was associated, for example, with the New York avant-garde coterie of Walter Arensberg and Allen

and Louise Norton, "post-decadents," as Van Vechten called them, who included Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, Wallace Stevens, Charles Demuth, Francis Picabia, and Donald Evans.[17] This group, as Deborah Longworth articulates, "combined the self-conscious artifice, stylistic ornamentation, and erotic innuendo of literary decadence, with a carefree irreverence and smart sophistication that spoke young and modern New York as much as it did *fin de siècle / fin du globe* of 1890s London."[18] These qualities were also found in the works of writers who circulated more within the mainstream and with whom Van Vechten would come to be linked, including James Gibbons Huneker, James Branch Cabell, Joseph Hergesheimer, Edgar Saltus, Ben Hecht, Henry Blake Fuller, Ronald Firbank, Aldous Huxley, and Michael Arlen, writers who were described variously as the "exquisites" and "the sophisticated school" and were associated with "new decadence."[19] Van Vechten's decadent circles also included Harlem Renaissance writers who exploited a fin-de-siècle aesthetic, such as Richard Bruce Nugent and Wallace Thurman. Many of Van Vechten's friends and acquaintances in these new decadent circles were interested in decadence not only as an aesthetic counter to other types of emerging modernist high culture and avant-gardism but also as a vehicle for expressing proscribed sexualities. These included Barnes, Nugent, Thurman, Firbank, and Fuller. Though Van Vechten was a married man whose relationship with his second wife, Fania Marinoff, an actress, was intense, passionate, and volatile, his was not a conventional marriage. He had relationships with others, primarily men, and he and Fania were part of a bohemian network in which homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, sexual promiscuity, interracial sexual relationships, cross-dressing, exhibitionism, and voyeurism were part of the sociocultural fabric. These "queer" contexts—both his interest in decadence as a viable alternative literary form of modernism and his interest in proscribed behaviors and values—established the parameters of Van Vechten's new decadence as exemplified in his fiction.

His first novel, *Peter Whiffle* (1922), is significant for its role in establishing new decadence as a counter to the high modernism of writers like Pound.[20] A semi-autobiographical novel centered on the avant-garde art scene of the 1910s, *Peter Whiffle* did for new decadence what George Moore had done for the old in *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888).[21] It achieved a popular success, going into many editions through the 1920s, a decade in which Van Vechten would publish six further novels focused on the decadent lifestyles of bohemian artists, wealthy eccentrics, misfits, and naive ingénues, set against the varying backdrops of Manhattan, Paris, Harlem, small-town

midwestern America, and Hollywood. These novels garnered him recognition as both an inheritor and updater of fin-de-siècle literary decadence. Reviews, for example, invariably place him in the company of decadents old and new, from George Moore, Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, Robert Hichens, J.-K. Huysmans, Arthur Machen, M. P. Shiel, Max Beerbohm, James Huneker, Arthur Schnitzler, Anatole France, and Edgar Saltus to James Branch Cabell, Ronald Firbank, and Aldous Huxley. Van Vechten would come to be regarded as a leader of this mode, his name serving as a byword for a style of decadent modernism in the 1920s and 1930s. Terms such as "Van Vechtenites," "the Van Vechten school," "the Van Vechten manner," and "a disciple of Van Vechten" were often used in reviews of the period to refer to the works of his lesser-known contemporaries.[22] New decadence, then, was a formidable presence in the literary marketplace, and Van Vechten was central to it.

A 1923 review of *The Blind Bow-Boy* by Burton Rascoe succinctly encapsulates his new decadent style:

> Mr. Van Vechten's new book . . . is by [way of] Robert Hichens's *The Green Carnation* [and] out of J. K. Huysmans's *A Rebours*. It is Dorian Gray and Des Esseintes cracking jokes at their own expense. . . . It . . . aim[s] to designate that which, for the moment, is chic, and to point out just wherein that quality is to be found between the too, too and the not quite. . . .
>
> Besides listing nearly all of the books and periodicals the up-to-date modern young man or woman is supposed to know something about, Mr. Van Vechten supplements the work of Emily Post on certain points of etiquette, and supplements the author of the Red Classified Telephone Directory on the subject of the location of shops where gowns, lingerie, perfumes, cosmetics, jewelery and French books may be found. . . .
>
> It is a clever and roguish book, conspicuously lacking in any ethical, philosophical or social purpose. In it are embedded, sometimes rather crudely and awkwardly, some of the ancient and current jokes of the streets. It is a book that is all icing and innuendo, deviltry, wit and doubles entendres. It would be a mistake to regard it as anything else.[23]

Rascoe's comments capture the key elements of Van Vechten's style—one that is decadent and that would, in the hands of Van Vechten and others, develop into a camp aesthetic characterized by artifice, extravagance, theatricality, irreverence, frivolity, play, and a pleasure in subversion and transgression.[24]

First, his work is characterized by its treatment of risqué subject matter in a jeweled writing style that emphasizes surface, artifice, and ambiguity ("icing and innuendo"). Second, Van Vechten indulges in a collecting and cataloguing aesthetic that looks back to Huysmans and Wilde and that manifests itself in thematic and formal terms. Thematically, his fictions feature characters defined by their material possessions and their exquisite tastes. In formal terms, this aesthetic structures narratives dominated, as Rascoe notes, by lists intended to educate aspiring new decadents in modern taste. This collecting and cataloguing aesthetic extends beyond thematic and formal terms to include the physical materiality of Van Vechten's novels, which were issued in colorful and attractive bindings at different price points and which he had a hand in designing. In all these respects, then, his work was situated in the company of the venerated decadent literature and art extolled in the novels themselves.

A third feature of Van Vechten's new decadence is an epideictic style—a style of oratory of praise and blame. Matthew Potolsky has foregrounded the importance of the epideictic mode for writers from Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Mirbeau to Swinburne, Moore, and Wilde, showing how it is deployed by decadents provocatively in order to praise that which is traditionally reviled, to revile that which is traditionally praised, to structure narratives of education or self-discovery, and to argue for new or revised literary and artistic canons.[25] The epideictic mode serves all these functions in Van Vechten's writing as well and is linked to his jeweled prose style and his collecting and cataloguing aesthetic. In his novels, elaborately styled encomium and obloquy color his double-voiced narratives of, and guides to, sophisticated, modern, and decadent lifestyles and tastes for queer subjects of two types: those whose queerness manifests itself in a desire to cultivate "strange," "odd," "peculiar," or "eccentric," in opposition to mainstream, culture and/or alternative forms of literary and artistic modernism, and those whose queerness is sex or gender based and who are seeking texts to be read in light of their own nonnormative identities.

A fourth element of Van Vechten's new decadence is the *léger* touch that he himself attributes to Firbank but that Rascoe credits him with too. Edmund Wilson perceptively documented this difference between 1890s and 1920s decadence (referring to the latter as "late violets") in a lengthy review essay on Firbank's *Flower Beneath the Foot* and Van Vechten's *The Blind Bow-Boy*, in which he argues that the earlier movement "derived its force from its extreme conviction of sin. . . . [Its] effectiveness . . . depends upon one's

being shocked . . . and when the prejudices to be shocked have been removed the works of art are no longer exciting."[26] By contrast, writers like Van Vechten and Firbank, he argues, "are able to take their heresies and pleasures easily. . . . The conviction of sin has been removed and it is possible for the corrupt to be amiable again."[27] While the first three qualities of Van Vechten's aesthetic derive explicitly from the decadence of the 1890s, this last one, as Wilson suggests, demonstrates a marked difference from the general tenor of the earlier movement. In this respect, the *léger* touch is distinctive to the new decadence and, further, is key to bringing a camp coloring to those features appropriated from 1890s decadence.

New Decadence in *The Blind Bow-Boy*

If *Peter Whiffle*, as I have suggested above, is a modernist *Confessions of a Young Man*, the proto-camp new decadent *The Blind Bow-Boy* might be read as a modernist take on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Like *Dorian Gray*, *The Blind Bow-Boy* is concerned with the corruption of innocence through the introduction of a youth to hedonistic pleasures. The hero, Harold Prewett, is a naive Dorian figure whose father contrives to have his son tutored in corruption in what turns out to be an attempted exercise in reverse psychology. Harold's father believes that his son will become so disgusted by the debauched lives of the wealthy bohemian set he becomes involved with that he will voluntarily and eagerly choose to take up his role in the family cloak and suit business and settle down to marriage and a family. Things do not go according to plan. Harold falls under the spell of his tutor, Paul Moody, a stylish, handsome aesthete, and his hedonistic circle of friends. These include the enigmatic and voyeuristic Campaspe Lorillard, the muse of the wealthy bohemian set; Zimbule O'Grady, an avaricious and animalistic Coney Island snake charmer and femme fatale; Titus Hogg, otherwise known as "Bunny," an avant-garde composer; Drains, the inscrutable butler with a past; and the Duke of Middlebottom, a British monocle-sporting dandy whose name was "eponymous for a certain group that frequented the Café Royal" and whose stationery is headed with the motto "a thing of beauty is a boy for ever."[28] The novel is largely plotless, charting a series of loosely connected episodes: Harold engages in bohemian pleasures with his new friends, slumming on Coney Island and producing an avant-garde play before attempting to settle down in a conventional marriage. When this marriage fails, he tries his hand at acting for the movies, has an affair with Zimbule, and, at the end of the novel, leaves for Europe with the Duke of Middlebottom.

Van Vechten's decadence—notably his treatment of hedonism, extravagant writing style, and penchant for cataloguing—manifests itself most explicitly in this novel in his delineation of his characters. The style of narration is appropriate to the world it presents, and characters are revealed through their possessions—clothes, books, home furnishings and decor, and so on. When Paul and Campaspe are introduced, for example, they are initially not individualized. The narrative frames them such that they are defined first by their surroundings: "In a room, the walls of which were lined with pale-green taffeta, a man and woman were sitting in the late June afternoon."[29] The narrative focuses first, in detail, on this room, which seems initially to overpower the man and woman. As the narrative focus zooms in on them, however, it becomes clear that they are of a piece, decoratively, with their environment. Here, for example, is the first part of this section, which begins with a detailed description of the room, before settling on its owner/occupier, Paul Moody, aesthete:

> It was a charming room with orange and gold lacquer screens, escritoires and tables of a severe Directoire pattern, needle-point chairs, and a chaste marble fireplace. Stalks of indigo larkspurs and salmon snapdragons emerged from tall crystal vases. A few books bound in gaily coloured boards lay on one of the tables, and the others were cluttered, huggermugger, with a variety of picturesque and valuable objects. A bright Manila shawl, embroidered in vermilion and lemon flowers, was thrown over the piano, and was held in place by a blue Canton china pitcher full of magenta roses. A copper bowl, heaped with ripe figs, stood on a console-table. Sanguines by Boucher and Fragonard, with indelicate subjects, hung on the walls. The broad windows looked down on Gramercy Park. This was the living-room of an apartment which included two small bedrooms, and an alcove, which served as a kitchen.
>
> A young man in white flannels, a young man with curly golden hair and blue eyes and a profile that resembled somewhat Sherril Schell's photograph of Rupert Brooke, a young man with slender, graceful hands which he was inclined to wave rather excessively in punctuation of his verbal effects, reclined on a divan upholstered with green taffeta, smoking a cigarette in a jade holder of a green so dark and so nearly translucent that it paraphrased emerald.[30]

Similar elaborate descriptions are given to the dwellings of Campaspe and the Duke of Middlebottom at other points in the book. While Virginia Woolf would famously associate such materialist preoccupations—the placing of "enormous stress upon the fabric of things, the appearance of things"—with

Edwardian realists such as Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy,[31] this aesthetic was central of course, too, to 1890s decadence. Indeed, the manner in which Paul is introduced echoes Lord Henry's first appearance in *Dorian Gray*: both are smoking and lying on exotic divans, Paul on one of green taffeta, Henry on one composed of "Persian saddle-bags."[32] Further, there are instances of the epigrammatic verbal style of Wilde—the description, for example, of a cigarette holder that "paraphrase[s] emerald." In opposition, then, to Woolf's disdain for materialist modes of representation, Van Vechten, like Wilde before him, subverts notions of subjective depth, insisting on the importance of artifice, surface, and the superficial.[33] He is attuned to, and self-reflexive about, the status of his style in relation to competing modernist forms, and his materialist mode is a deliberate provocation to the alternative modernist aesthetics of his contemporaries.

Van Vechten challenges contemporaneous modernist modes not only be countering them outright but also by exploiting their methods in ironic and subversive ways. In *The Blind Bow-Boy*, his decadent and Edwardian materialist preoccupations appear alongside more recognizably "modernist" tactics, as in his use of free indirect discourse to represent the psychological interiority of characters. While in the hands of high modernists like Woolf this narrative mode worked in the service of depth psychology, Van Vechten uses it to undermine the value it is given in the works of his modernist contemporaries. In *The Blind Bow-Boy*, Campaspe is the figure to whom he gives us most access through free indirect discourse, and, in one important section of the novel, her thoughts serve as a means to espouse a new decadent aesthetic. This pages-long reverie occurs about two-thirds into the novel and is prompted by Campaspe's dissatisfaction with a book—Waldo Frank's *Dark Mother*—and by her remembrance of Nietzsche's first principle of aesthetics ("What is good is easy; everything divine runs with light feet"):

> Why, she wondered, did authors write in this uncivilized and unsophisticated manner? How was it possible to read an author who never laughed? For it was only behind laughter that true tragedy could lie concealed, only the ironic author who could awaken the deeper emotions. The tragedies of life, she reflected, were either ridiculous or sordid. The only way to get the sense of this absurd, contradictory, and perverse existence into a book was to withdraw entirely from the reality. The artist who feels most poignantly the bitterness of life wears a persistent and sardonic smile. . . . A book, Campaspe considered, should have the swiftness of melodrama, the lightness of farce, to be a real contribution to thought. . . .

> How could anything serious be hidden more successfully than in a book which pretended to be light and gay? Plot was certainly unimportant in the novel; character drawing a silly device. . . . In life we never know anything about the families and early lives of the people we meet; why should we have to learn all about them in books? Growth of character in a novel was nonsense. People never change. Psychology: the supreme imbecility. The long and complicated analyses that serious writers give us merely define the mental limitations of these writers.[34]

In the midst of these reflections, she contrasts good and bad practice, exploiting the epideictic mode to produce an eclectic literary canon along new decadent principles. In her account, conventional wisdom is reversed: serious, respected writers are brought low through an alignment with popular writers; popular writers, meanwhile, are accorded high literary value; and neglected and lesser-known writers are introduced to destabilize the traditional canon. Serious novelist and political activist Waldo Frank, for example, who initiates her thoughts, is likened to the best-selling Gene Stratton-Porter as a mushy and sentimental writer; the experimental modernist John Dos Passos is put on the level of popular fiction writer Rupert Hughes as appealing to an "unsophisticated crowd"; the bitterness and solemnity of Theodore Dreiser are compared negatively with what she regards as the superior sardonic work of avant-garde expressionist dramatist Georg Kaiser; writers including André Salmon, Sylvestre Bonnard, Hilaire Belloc, Herman Melville, and Ouida, meanwhile, are singled out for praise, while James Joyce is condemned.[35] "Works like *Ulysses*," Campaspe declares irreverently, "are always out of date. At first too modern, they soon grow old-fashioned."[36]

This long passage has a twofold function. Most obviously, as described above, it functions as literary criticism of the contemporary field. Less explicitly, but of equal importance, it serves as a key to understanding the more serious themes of the novel and the aesthetic and sexual politics of Van Vechten's new decadence. One of the most telling points occurs when Campaspe asks, "How could anything serious be hidden more successfully than in a book which pretended to be light and gay?" This rhetorical question functions precisely as a prompt for how to read Van Vechten. Against the dismissive views of Woolf and other modernists concerning the materialism of decadent and Edwardian writing styles, Campaspe's query about concealing serious themes beneath a light surface hints at Van Vechten's modus operandi, which was, as he himself insisted, to "treat serious themes as frivolously as possible."[37] These themes, he said, were "modern variations" on

"classic themes," and his novels were consistently concerned with "a man who is alone in the world and very sad."[38] Like his earnest-minded modernist contemporaries, then, whose work, Sherry argues, exhibits a tension between a drive for novelty and the new and a pessimism about progressive modernity,[39] Van Vechten is interested in the philosophical problems of his age, though in his fiction these themes percolate beneath the surface.

While the surface/depth model invoked by Campaspe is one way of understanding the transvaluation of values enacted in the decadent styles of writers like Wilde and Van Vechten, Gertrude Stein understood Van Vechten's practice in different spatial terms, as a disruption of the relationship between foreground and background. Writing to him about *The Blind Bow-Boy*, she said, "Others have tried to make background foreground, but you have made foreground background and our foreground is our background."[40] Though cryptic almost to the level of incomprehensibility, Stein's remarks attend to the shift in perception necessary for reading Van Vechten's seemingly simple narratives in a complex manner. Stein herself, in other parts of this letter, indicates that her attention has been drawn to minor female characters in the novel, some of whom are merely mentioned, rather than appearing in any substantial way in the action of the novel: Amy, the ex-wife of Paul, turned lesbian; Laura, Campaspe's close friend, a woman trapped by her conventionalism; and Fannie, Campaspe's mother, a beautiful, youthful, much-married, life-loving woman whose relationship with her daughter is more sisterly than motherly. To Stein, these minor characters, and the inner life dramas they hint at, are the center of the drama—they are the foreground that he has made background. Whether one is reading the low as high art, the high as low art, surface as depth, or foreground as background, Van Vechten's new decadence resists, while at the same time demonstrating an ability to accommodate itself to, the more serious philosophical interests of the modernism of many of his contemporaries.

If Campaspe's musings invite us to take Van Vechten's new decadence seriously as a modernist aesthetic, they also ask us to attend to the queer sexual politics that might be understood as another foreground made background in the novel. Here, too, as in Van Vechten's play on the double meaning of "queer" in his comments on Firbank, the "detonations" and "connotations" of Campaspe's words direct us to the serious matter beneath the froth. When she asks, "How could anything serious be hidden more successfully than in a book which pretended to be light and gay?" the word "gay," of course, connotes "light-hearted" and "carefree," but it also suggestively

gestures toward another meaning of the term—"homosexual."[41] As the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, the etymology of the term "gay" to denote homosexual is somewhat uncertain, though evidence suggests that it was circulating in homosexual communities in the 1920s.[42] Intriguingly, the first such usage recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from Stein's "Miss Furr and Miss Skene" (dated 1908–10 or 1911, published 1922), a short gnomic story, often read as an expression of queer desire, about the growth and breakup of a friendship between two women, in which the word "gay" is used 136 times, in shifting connotations and what Van Vechten would undoubtedly understand as "detonations."[43] Van Vechten's deep embeddedness in the homosexual and bohemian subcultures of the era means that he was sure to have known this usage and, moreover, would, like Stein, relish the opportunity to play on its double meaning in a mainstream context. It is indeed possible, too, that the choice of the name "Campaspe" is doubly symbolic also: first for its obvious classical literary and cultural resonances, and second, perhaps with a view to drawing attention to the "camp" in Campaspe. Like "queer" and "gay," "camp," referring to the "ostentatious," "affected," "theatrical," and "effeminate" behaviors associated with homosexuals, is another word that was part of subcultural discourses in this period, before becoming mainstreamed.[44] Indeed, though Robert Crunden's insistence that in *The Blind Bow-Boy* Van Vechten is developing a "bisexual, or androgynous, sense of speech and form as a variety of modernist discourse" is suggestive,[45] it seems more apt to consider the degree to which, with Campaspe, he is performing a queer or camp cross-dressing act. Whereas, for example, in his first novel, *Peter Whiffle*, Van Vechten appears as himself, in *The Blind Bow-Boy* he appears in drag, "camping" it up, as his views and ideas are filtered through his female heroine.

By Van Vechten's account, Campaspe, as he explained to Hugh Walpole, "sums the whole thing up" and is the key to the meaning of the novel.[46] If Campaspe's literary musings quoted above are, in turn, regarded as central to that meaning, Van Vechten wants readers to understand both the text's more explicit status as a rejection of an earnest modernist aesthetic and the more covert and serious meaning beneath its "light and gay" surface. Just as Van Vechten's invocation of the figure of Wilde alerts us to attend to the possible double meaning of "queer" in his comments on Firbank, in this passage a coded reference performs the same function to illuminate alternative meanings for Campaspe's use of the term "gay." Here, the reference that opens up the potential for a queer reading of the text is the novel that initi-

ates her reflections—Waldo Frank's *Dark Mother* (1920), a book that parallels the themes of *The Blind Bow-Boy*, but in a serious manner influenced by the work of D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce. Like *The Blind Bow-Boy*, *Dark Mother* centers on a naive young man who goes to New York City after the death of his mother. A study in repressed homosexuality, the novel charts his fraught relationships with women and his intense friendship with an older man. Whereas Frank, however, takes a psychoanalytic and mystical approach to his serious subject, Van Vechten takes a sardonic and playful one in a book that, ultimately, can be read as a narrative of coming into gay consciousness.

New Decadence, Queer Reading, and *The Blind Bow-Boy*

In hindsight, it is difficult to imagine that Van Vechten's contemporary readers would not have grasped the homosexual theme of the story, especially in the more explicit allusions that pepper the novel: for example, the character of Amy, Paul's ex-wife, whose turn to lesbianism is pithily expressed as having "lost her Paul," and who "had, according to report, found her Paula"; the unsubtly named Duke of Middlebottom and his salacious stationary motto; and a reference to Campaspe's son's uncomfortable encounter with a Spanish boy at boarding school who makes "a curious request" of him.[47] Other, less explicit allusions include hints about Campaspe's own sexuality as registered through the intensity of her friendship with Laura and her strong attachment to Zimbule. While these elements lend a queer coloring to the novel, the core figure of Van Vechten's serious "gay" theme is, of course, Harold, the "sad" and "alone" man in this story. If, to use Stein's terms, the "foreground" of this story is understood as Harold's coming into gay consciousness, Van Vechten places this theme as "background" to the showier antics of the bohemian world he presents. Van Vechten does, however, hint at Harold's queer identity early in the novel, which describes his upbringing by an eccentric aunt and how his effeminate appearance and fastidious dress sense make him a target of mockery and bullying, incidents he recalls with an intense sense of shame. These early hints are overshadowed, however, through most of the novel, by emphasizing Harold's involvement in heterosexual relationships and by the generally gay world that is represented: gay in yet another sense—that of being "wanton," "lewd," "lascivious," "promiscuous," and "hedonistic."[48] This subject matter aligns the novel more generally with literary decadence's interest in proscribed lifestyles and behaviors and distracts, perhaps, from a more specifically homo-

sexual understanding of the text. The novel's ending, though, in which Campaspe spies Harold and the Duke on board a ship destined for Europe, closes the circle, inviting a consideration of the next phase of Harold's self-discovery and worldly education through the figure of the homosexual Duke.

For the time, this ending was controversial and deliberately provoking, something not lost on Van Vechten's friend Emily Clark, who was intrigued to see what critics would make of it.[49] Much to Van Vechten's disappointment, most reviewers did not, apparently, make enough of the serious underpinnings of his work. "Nobody has written anything about the book yet, though one or two hover around it," he complained to Hugh Walpole.[50] To be fair, given the historical context, not much *could* be made, publicly and in print, of the serious theme. One of those who "hover[ed] around it" was Heywood Broun, who extolled *The Blind Bow-Boy* as a book that "propagandizes for all those brave beings who seek, in spite of tyranny, to follow their own inclinations."[51] For the most part, though, reviewers preferred, overall, to remark on its links to the literary decadence of the 1890s, or its gayness in other senses of the word—its lasciviousness, a feature that also marked it as decadent—or its lightness of treatment. Indeed, Rascoe actively discourages a serious reading of it, saying that "it would be a mistake to regard it as anything" other than "icing and innuendo, deviltry, wit and doubles entendres."[52] Even many of Van Vechten's own family and friends failed to acknowledge its seriousness. Van Vechten's father objected to the decadent lifestyles it represented, complaining of its "depravity," seeing it not as a serious book but as something meant to "amuse" and that would "shock and disgust" many.[53] Likewise, H. L. Mencken, though saying he liked the novel overall, deplored its sometimes "lamentable lasciviousness."[54]

Van Vechten must have been pleased, therefore, at readers who went beyond the surface treatment of decadence and homosexuality in the representation of the Duke to intuit the more serious import of this novel about queer identity that Broun was hinting at. Indeed, his preservation of fan letters reacting to this theme suggests as much. It is not always clear what these readers intend with their letters that probe Van Vechten about sexuality and decadent living in the novel. Some might be read as coy and tentative in their appeals to Van Vechten to elucidate the book's meaning. One female reader, for example, asks, "Is the Duke meant to be depicted as a degenerate (as one claims)—and if so, what difference does that make?"[55] A more demanding male reader from Baltimore, meanwhile, presses him further, intriguingly comparing himself to Harold, though his indirectness makes

it unclear whether he is in accord with or against what he understands to be Van Vechten's intention:

> What is your objective in this book? What real message do you wish to bring? I am a young man twenty years of age, have had two years of college work. I too, have commenced my business career much the same as "Harold Prewett." I can hardly agree that a year's worldly experience such as prescribed by "Harold's father" would be practical or probable even in this day and age.
>
> Hoping that you will take this message in the same spirit in which it is written, and if I may trouble you—pardon me.[56]

Another young college man in Iowa is equally curious, expressing a keen interest in knowing the fate of Harold: "Am I to feel that Harold has the best before him? Is that the way you want me to feel? I wonder if he, too, will soon be unable to count the people he has slept with? Will his hair turn blonde and curly? Will he stutter? Wonderful Man! Did you actually have an idea? You did succeed in making Harold seem real. Would you be so kind as to tell me his fate? . . . I trust you will understand my motive in writing."[57] An older man from New Jersey is more explicit in signaling his sexuality, asserting his kinship with Harold: "My bringing up and education was very similar to that of Harold Prewett, although I think I was a type more repressed. It has only been with the last year (and I am in my thirties) I have awakened to the fact that other men live while I have been merely existing. Your Duke is a most delightful character. . . . Thank you for bringing these characters in my life."[58] These letters speak tellingly to a felt need for narratives expressing the lived experiences of those marginalized as a result of their lifestyles, behaviors, and sexual identities. The dearth of fictional narratives of this type underpins these correspondents' great eagerness to know Van Vechten's meaning and/or the outcome for his characters. At the same time, of course, the letters indicate how new decadence is beginning to function as a discourse for the expression of queer identity, even while, at another level, addressing a mainstream heterosexual audience.

The ability of Van Vechten's novels, however, to "pass" can be, and has been, regarded as evidence of their ineffectuality as subversive texts. Corinne Blackmer, for example, argues that "subversion, when unnoticed or ineffective, faces the danger of devolving into more insidious forms of ideological compliance and self-erasure" and points to the limitations of narratives like *The Blind Bow-Boy* in which "homosexuals must disappear from sight in order to be free."[59] Blackmer's argument is one often pitched against camp, an in-

sistence, originating in Sontag's early commentary, that this aesthetic is apolitical and depoliticized.[60] A similar charge has often been launched against decadence, where its detachment, disengagement, and promotion of art for art's sake are taken for signs of an apolitical agenda.[61] Certainly, Campaspe's advice to Harold for how social outliers should operate in the world is hardly revolutionary: "Conform externally with the world's demands and you will get anything you desire in life."[62] Seeing this philosophy as one underpinning Van Vechten's own seemingly conformist narratives, Blackmer, for one, argues that he comes up short in comparison with the more radical Stein.[63]

Alternative scholarly perspectives on both decadence and camp, however, open up avenues for considering Van Vechten as both aesthetically and culturally more radical than has generally been suggested. Sherry's ground-shifting work on decadence and modernism is a case in point. Sherry deftly demonstrates that, despite the repeated disavowals of decadence by modernists, it was a constitutive element of canonical modernism, an "erstwhile twin" or "disapproved double," as he characterizes it, to the "better angel" represented by symbolism.[64] As conceptualized by Sherry, the relationship of modernists to decadence is very much a grappling with a literary inheritance of the past. As such, he does not consider the very presentness and contemporaneity of decadence if thinking, as I am doing here, about the prevalence and threat of the new decadence of Van Vechten and others in the literary field of the day. In this sense, I see the work of Van Vechten and other new decadents as a means of extending Sherry's conception of the relationship between decadence and modernism. Van Vechten's strategic exploitation of decadence as a queer—in the sense of "strange, odd, peculiar, or eccentric"—resistance to contemporaneous forms of modernism means that the new decadence is as much a "disapproved double" as its fin-de-siècle forebear, a notion supported by the striking animosity with which Lewis and others regarded this school of literature. At the same time, Van Vechten's new decadence figures importantly for thinking about the relationship between decadence and camp, as well as arguments for the social and political efficacy of these forms as an aesthetics of resistance and subversion. Van Vechten's new decadence in *The Blind Bow-Boy*, and in his work more broadly speaking, is crucial to the development of a language and strategies of communication for the expression of queer desires and identities in terms of gender and sexuality. That this language is as yet new and not fully codified is indicated by the hesitancies, allusions, hints, and coded forms of commu-

nication enacted in the reception of his work, most notably by his queer readers. It is clear, nevertheless, that this aesthetic is the basis for the kind of more fully developed camp aesthetic that Meyer defines as "the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility."[65] Queerness may just be peeping out of the closet in *The Blind Bow-Boy*, but Cupid's arrow was undoubtedly hitting its mark with those readers who had a personal investment in its serious underlying themes.

Notes

1. Ezra Pound, "Mr. Villerant's Morning Outburst," *Little Review* 5, no. 7 (Nov. 1918): 11.

2. Wyndham Lewis, "The Blessings of the Sophisticated School of Literature," *Enemy* 2 (1927): 111.

3. A growing body of revisionary scholarship has emerged in recent years to challenge this conventional understanding, of which this volume of essays is a part. Notable studies include David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 1995); Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015); and Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2015).

4. The terms "new decadence" and "new American decadence" were applied to Van Vechten's first novel, *Peter Whiffle*, in British reviews of the day. See anonymous, "An American Decadent," *London Observer*, 25 Mar. 1923, 4; review of *Peter Whiffle*, by Carl Van Vechten, *Southport Guardian*, 28 July 1923 (review accessed as clipping in Van Vechten's scrapbooks [Van Vechten Papers], which does not include a page number). Alfred Kazin would later use the term "new decadence" in his groundbreaking early 1942 study of this period in literature to describe those he termed "the exquisites," a broader group of American postwar writers, including Van Vechten, who cultivated a self-consciously precious style in resistance to puritanical bourgeois values of the day.

5. Lewis, "Blessings of the Sophisticated School of Literature," 111.

6. "Queer, adj., 1a," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

7. "Queer, adj., 3," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016. Though used in the homosexual community as a descriptive term, it began to be used pejoratively in mainstream US culture in the 1920s. See Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon, 2011), xvii.

8. Letter from Carl Van Vechten to Gertrude Stein, 26 Nov. 1914, in *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*, vol. 1, *1913–1935*, ed. Edward Burns (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 32. Van Vechten liked this account of Stein's verbal prowess so much that he recycled it in *The Blind Bow-Boy*, where his heroine, Campaspe

Lorillard, uses it to describe Stein's writing. See Carl Van Vechten, *The Blind Bow-Boy* (1923; repr., Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2018), 119.

9. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Oscar Wilde, Effeminacy, and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 3; Moe Meyer, "Under the Sign of Wilde: An Archaeology of Posing," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Moe Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994), 104.

10. Against a large body of critics who regard Van Vechten's homosexual and/or queer aesthetic negatively for what is regarded as its racist underpinnings, Corinne Blackmer is unique in arguing for the "inclusive, democratic, contemporary and cosmopolitan" potential of what she identifies as his queer aesthetic and its subversive challenge to heterosexist norms. See Corinne E. Blackmer, "Selling Taboo Subjects: The Literary Commerce of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten," in *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, and Rereading*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1996), 223, 224.

11. The links between decadence and camp have been widely acknowledged since Susan Sontag's groundbreaking essay of 1964, which is dedicated to Wilde and conceptualizes camp as "a certain mode of aestheticism." See Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999), 53–65, quote on 54. More recently, Gary McMahon has noted that "Camp was an English literary fashion of the late 19th–early 20th century that partied with Decadence," and he identifies their shared characteristics as a preference of art over naturalism, an interest in esoteric decoration, effeminacy, predisposition to ennui, and extremism. See Gary McMahon, *Camp in Literature* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 9. Similarly, for many scholars, camp is inherently queer. Moe Meyer, for example, defines "Camp" (capitalization his) as "the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility." See Moe Meyer, "Introduction: Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, ed. Moe Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

12. George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006), 178. Van Vechten is cited as an early proponent of camp by, e.g., Philip Core, *Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth* (New York: Delilah Books, 1984), 20; David Van Leer, *The Queening of America: Gay Culture in Straight Society* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 37–39; and Fabio Cleto, "Introduction: Queering the Camp," in Cleto, *Camp*, 9.

13. Meyer, "Introduction," 2–3.

14. Bruce Kellner, *Carl Van Vechten and the Irreverent Decades* (Norman: U Oklahoma P, 1968), 10.

15. Kellner, *Carl Van Vechten*, 32.

16. These notebooks are contained in boxes 111 and 112 of the Carl Van Vechten Papers, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.

17. Van Vechten, "Rogue Elephant in Porcelain," *Yale University Library Gazette* 38, no. 2 (1963): 46.

18. Deborah Longworth, "The Avant-Garde in the Village: *Rogue* (1915)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2, *North America 1894-1960*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 468-69.

19. The term "exquisites," as indicated above, is Kazin's. "Sophisticated school" is Lewis's phrase from his attack on popular 1920s writers in the *Enemy* (111-12), but it is also used fairly widely in reviews and criticism of the period.

20. I have written in detail elsewhere on *Peter Whiffle* and its relationship to 1890s decadence and contemporaneous modernist texts, demonstrating how decadent modernism, in this text, functions as a strategic intervention in debates about the modern artist and modern art in the 1910s and 1920s. See Kirsten MacLeod, "Making It New, Old School: Carl Van Vechten and Decadent Modernism," *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations* 16 (2012): 209-24.

21. Chicago critic Fanny Butcher, for example, described *Peter Whiffle* as like Moore's *Confessions* but "less mentally nude." Review of *Peter Whiffle*, by Carl Van Vechten, *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1922, pt. 8, 14.

22. Van Vechten's scrapbooks, thirty volumes covering from 1906 to 1955, are held in the Van Vechten Papers, New York Public Library. They are an excellent source for mapping out the byways of decadent literary modernism. They contain reviews not only of his own works but also of those by other writers, many of them obscure, that mention him as an influence or source.

23. Burton Rascoe, review of *The Blind Bow-Boy,* by Carl Van Vechten, *New York Tribune,* 26 Aug. 1923, 17.

24. These are among the qualities associated with camp since early delineations of the aesthetic, notably Susan Sontag's influential, though controversial, essay of 1964.

25. Matthew Potolsky, "In Praise of Decadence: The Epideictic Mode from Baudelaire to Wilde," in *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle*, ed. Jason David Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2013), 103-9.

26. Edmund Wilson, "Late Violets from the Nineties," *Dial* 75 (Oct. 1923): 388-89.

27. Wilson, "Late Violets," 390.

28. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 66. In one of his notebooks covering 1914 (box 112, Van Vechten Papers), Van Vechten attributes this epigram to his friend Allen Norton. Van Vechten liked it so much that he had used it previously (acknowledging Norton) as an epigraph to an essay on Waslav Nijinsky in *Interpreters and Interpretations* (New York: Knopf, 1917).

29. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 33.

30. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 33.

31. Virginia Woolf, "Character in Fiction," in *Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, *1919-1924*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1988), 432.

32. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 3, *The Picture of Dorian Gray 1890 and 1891 Texts*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 169.

33. Jonathan Dollimore offers the most extensive study of Wilde's anti-essentialist "transgressive aesthetic" of appropriating and transvaluing conventional values through a process of inversion in *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 14–17, 64–73.

34. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 94–97.

35. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 94–97.

36. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 97.

37. Cited in Kellner, *Carl Van Vechten*, 143.

38. Letter from Carl Van Vechten to Mabel Dodge Luhan, 8 Oct. 1924, in *Letters of Carl Van Vechten*, ed. Bruce Kellner (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987), 72.

39. See Sherry, *Reinvention of Decadence*, 1–36.

40. Letter from Gertrude Stein to Carl Van Vechten, [late Aug. 1923], in Burns, *Letters*, 86–87.

41. "Gay, adj., A3a," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016; "Gay, adj., A4d," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

42. "Gay, adj., adv., and n.," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

43. "Gay, adj., A4d," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

44. "Camp, adj., A," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

45. Robert M. Crunden, *Body and Soul: The Making of American Modernism* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 185.

46. Cited in Kellner, *Carl Van Vechten*, 64.

47. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 127, 66, 150. Publisher Grant Richards found the Duke's motto, the reference to the boarding school incident, and a mention of flagellation too explicit and insisted on their removal from the British edition of *The Blind Bow-Boy*. See letter from Richards to Van Vechten, 9 Apr. 1923, box 16, Van Vechten Papers.

48. "Gay, adj., A4a, A4b," *OED Online*, accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

49. Letter from Emily Clark to Carl Van Vechten, [10 Aug. 1923], box 16, Van Vechten Papers.

50. Letter from Carl Van Vechten to Hugh Walpole (ca. 25 Aug. 1923), in Kellner, *Letters*, 54.

51. Heywood Broun, "'The Blind Bow-Boy' Hits a Chrome Yellow Target," *New York World*, 19 Aug. 1923. Review accessed as clipping in Van Vechten's scrapbooks (Van Vechten Papers), which does not include a page number.

52. Rascoe, review of *The Blind Bow-Boy*, 17.

53. Letter from Charles Duane Van Vechten to Carl Van Vechten, 10 Aug. 1923, box 16, Van Vechten Papers.

54. Letter from H. L. Mencken to Van Vechten, 28 Aug. 1923, box 16, Van Vechten Papers.

55. Letter to Carl Van Vechten, 28 Feb. 1924, box 16, Van Vechten Papers. I have withheld the names of this correspondent and the following three to protect the identity of these private individuals.

56. Letter to Carl Van Vechten, 16 Oct. 1923, box 16, Van Vechten Papers.

57. Letter to Carl Van Vechten, 24 May 1924, box 16, Van Vechten Papers.

58. Letter to Carl Van Vechten, 31 Mar. 1924, box 16, Van Vechten Papers.

59. Blackmer, "Selling Taboo Subjects," 226, 239.

60. Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 54.

61. Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky's 1998 collection of essays on decadence, which sets out to counter the "ideological biases" that characterize understandings of the movement, marked an important shift in scholarship. This work has informed more recent approaches to decadence, which increasingly consider the strategic manner in which decadent writers engage with aesthetic, social, and political issues. Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky, introduction to *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 1999), 2, 1–32.

62. Van Vechten, *Blind Bow-Boy*, 42.

63. Blackmer, "Selling Taboo Subjects," 243.

64. Sherry, *Reinvention of Decadence*, 9.

65. Meyer, "Introduction," 5.

11 A Decadent Dream Deferred

Bruce Nugent and the Harlem Renaissance's Queer Modernity

Michèle Mendelssohn

"I look youthful and attractive. Like Mr. Wilde's Dorian Gray, only not so girlish," thinks the African American hero of Bruce Nugent's 1928 novel, *Gentleman Jigger*.[1] Nugent calls his character Stuartt, but it would be more accurate to call him the author's alter ego, a thinly veiled autobiographical pen portrait of a "society-artist-playboy of the Western world extraordinaire" whose sexual desires are ambiguous and whose masculinity is assured.[2] Pale skinned and radiant, Stuartt/Nugent is a multitasker who can gaze at a "strange yellow-brown" Greco-Roman-looking man and think of him both as a conquest and as a good subject for a decadent painting—an intriguingly anachronistic composition in which the man's torso would be set against "an ultra-modern room with silver walls and red chairs."[3]

So far, so *Picture of Dorian Gray*, right? Well, yes, but not quite: Nugent's novel goes farther than Wilde's and dispenses with its Victorian homosexual panic. "I'm not ashamed of any of the ways in which I like you," Stuartt coolly informs the object of his affection, "just because it is considered wrong and not normal. I guess I'm only interested in what's normal for me."[4] Today, pride is the new normal. But it wasn't so in the early decades of the twentieth century, when Harlem Renaissance writers achieved two important firsts: showcasing African Americans as a community for the first time and enabling "gay and lesbian artists to express their sexuality with a greater degree of freedom than at any other period in American history," according to Henry Louis Gates Jr.[5]

Still, many Harlem Renaissance writers favored indirection and secrecy. Not so with Nugent. Then as now, his works and biography stand out because of his direct, unabashed treatment of homosexuality and bisexuality. Shame and homosexual panic were not part of Nugent's repertoire. During the Jazz

Photograph of Bruce Nugent, from "Photographs of Blacks" by Carl Van Vechten. Courtesy of the Beinecke Digital Collections, Yale University.

Age, he frequented speakeasies for "rough queers . . . the kind that fought better than truck drivers and swished better than Mae West," he said.[6]

Among members of the Harlem Renaissance, Nugent was one of the few African American writers with the audacity to challenge homophobic prejudice and explicitly portray interracial sensuality. He was also one of the few who actively sought to reimagine decadent forebears like Wilde, Huysmans, and Beardsley in a fearless, out, color-proud and color-blind way. "You see," Nugent matter-of-factly told an interviewer in the 1980s, "I am a homosexual. I have never been in what they call 'the closet.' It has *never* occurred to me that it was anything to be ashamed of."[7] This mix of uncompromising authenticity and superlative performative flair was Nugent's calling card.

A sexual and artistic pioneer, he lived to see the utopian vision he had

fashioned from the shards of nineteenth-century decadence become a reality. By the time he died, in 1987, he had witnessed a period of gay liberation his *confrères*—European and American, black and white, male and female—had only dreamed of. In 2002, when selections of Nugent's remarkable work first appeared in a collected edition, the editor christened Nugent the "gay rebel of the Harlem Renaissance."

Nugent's rebelliousness didn't consign him to the gutter (like his inspiration Oscar Wilde). Still, it would be wrong to romanticize his biography. There are striking parallels between the desultory place he now occupies in modernist literary history and the domestic insecurity he suffered throughout his life. This becomes abundantly clear when you see his papers in Yale's Beinecke Library, an elegant mid-twentieth-century monument where his stylish ostentations are precisely catalogued, his decadent turns of phrase carefully preserved, and his sensual characters still peacock their worldliness. Nugent could not have hoped for a finer resting place than within these golden marble walls. Yet the archive also contains clues that his life was not nearly as luxurious. Metaphorically, his pages are fragrant with the perfumes of nineteenth-century decadence. Literally, they are stained with cat urine. In fact, Nugent's archive has the dubious distinction of being the only one in the Yale database that mentions such markings. When I opened the manila folders that contain his homoerotic Bible stories, for instance, his jewelled, technicolor prose leapt from the pages, but the cat had left its unmistakeable marks around the edges, and I couldn't help but think of the part in *Gentleman Jigger* when Stuartt/Nugent says, "Chicago's stockyard stench is veritable perfume to me."[8]

For all the attention Nugent attracted in his early and later years, his biography remains unwritten, and many of his writings unpublished. Although he was larger-than-life, he is still considered a minor figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Histories of modernism shrink his legacy further, so that he rarely features at all.[9] This is curious given that, more than any other member of the Harlem Renaissance, Nugent mixed nineteenth-century decadent and aesthetic sources into his biography to make identity visible in a precocious, modern way. In what follows, I explain how, by living in the past, Nugent found a way of living in a bigoted present. In doing so, he created black queer modernity.

Richard Bruce Nugent was born in 1906. Growing up in Washington, DC, he was a part of the city's legendary colored society, a set that the poet

Langston Hughes described as if it existed on a pedestal high above the lives of ordinary African Americans. "Even as a little boy in Kansas," Hughes said, he had definite "ideas of the grandeur of Negro life in the capitol."[10]

Nugent's mother's family, the Bruces, were considered blue bloods: they had been free people of color since the eighteenth century. But his paternal grandparents had seen their own family sold as slaves.[11] Nugent's father worked as a Pullman porter, while his mother hosted bohemian salons with composers, actors, and artists. The family library was, by Nugent's own account, "esoteric" and included the German sexologist Richard Kraft-Ebbing and an illustrated guide to reproductive health. "There were beautiful, wonderful pictures in it that told you all about diseases with wonderful names like 'syphilis' and 'gonorrhea,' " he recalled in an interview.[12] At Dunbar High School, the eleven-year-old was told to write a story. He named his heroine Hymen.

When he was thirteen, Nugent's family life changed dramatically. His father died of consumption, and his mother moved to New York, where she passed for white and waitressed. Nugent did his part, taking whatever work he could come by: delivering hats, running errands and photographic proofs, carting hotel luggage. At nineteen, he passed as white, giving himself out as the Spanish aristocrat Ricardo Nugenti de Dosceta, a practice he continued until he realized, as he later put it, that "it was stupid to pass."[13]

It was around this time, at one of Georgia Douglas Johnson's Washington salons, that "Ricardo" met Langston Hughes. The two became fast friends. In the evenings, they would amuse themselves by walking around barefoot for the shock value, or gaining access to white theaters by passing for South Americans. In more serious moments, they talked about producing a magazine dedicated to younger African American artists. Soon enough, Hughes had persuaded "Ricardo" to come up to Harlem. What happened there in the 1920 and 1930s would lead to the formation of the Harlem Renaissance's gay rebel.

Barely out of his teens, Nugent's life took its first dramatic turn in 1925, when Alain Locke decided to include his story "Sahdji" in *The New Negro*. It granted Nugent a sudden legitimacy and made him a somebody in Harlem. By 1926, he had been living in Harlem for less than a year and had met all the key players—Carl Van Vechten, Countee Cullen, and others. He joined "the Niggerati," a group of young African American artists who set them-

selves in opposition to established cultural and race leaders like Locke and W. E. B. Du Bois.

The world was Nugent's plaything, and Harlem an experimental playground. At the age of twenty, he wrote a sensuous tale of same-sex desire and discovery. "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" first appeared in *Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists* under the pseudonym "Richard Bruce." The story came with a promising subtitle—"a novel, part one"—that suggested that there would be more to come from this unknown author. Ostentatiously self-assured and about as far from the black establishment's art-propaganda as could be, "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" sent shock waves through Harlem and beyond. Few could have known that it was only partly fictional, and fewer still that Nugent had folded elements of his private life into the homoerotic fantasy he presented through the consciousness of a black decadent called Alex. In fact, the shell of Alex's life was identical to Nugent's: Alex's father had died six years ago, he first came to New York at the age of fourteen, and by nineteen he was unemployed and trying his hand at art.[14]

Yet it would be false to conclude that Alex's story is only Nugent's. By taking the shell of his private experience and encrusting it with ornaments borrowed from decadence, Nugent was able to tell the story of a man whose desires and thoughts make him "so different from other people."[15] Similarly, in the bible of decadence, Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* (1884), the hero, Des Esseintes, takes a living tortoise and bejewels its shell, transforming nature's creation into a gaudy creature. The process kills the tortoise but serves as an object lesson in decadence's grotesque sophistication and love of artifice at any price. The ornate tortoise shell is a useful way of visualizing what Nugent was up to in "Smoke, Lilies and Jade." Indeed, the references he embedded in the story are clues to how he was repurposing nineteenth-century European decadence for the twentieth century.

"Really you're a mystery to me," Alex's mother tells him, "and who you take after . . . I'm sure I don't know."[16] ("Did Wilde's parents or Shelley's or Goya's talk to them like that," Alex wonders.)[17] Alex could be described as the intellectual love child of the Harlem Renaissance and decadence. What little action the story contains unfolds as Alex reclines and reflects, occasionally writing a poem or reading Wilde or Freud.[18] A theatrical aesthete, he longs to wear a black cape lined with vermilion, black velvet trousers, and a yellow shirt.[19]

Alex's aesthetic inspiration is Lord Henry Wotton, *The Picture of Dorian*

Gray's grand dandy. On the first page of Wilde's novel, we find Lord Henry lounging on a Persian sofa "smoking, as usual, innumerable cigarettes" while pontificating about art "through the thin blue wreaths of smoke."[20] Lord Henry thinks that "a cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure," because "it leaves one unsatisfied."[21] As it turns out, Alex thinks so, too. His meditations emanate from a blue cloud of cigarette smoke puffed from an ivory holder inlaid with red and green jade. Assuming the languid posture of Lord Henry, his spiritual father, Alex wonders, "Was it Wilde who had said . . . a cigarette is the most perfect pleasure because it leaves one unsatisfied."[22]

At the formal level Nugent's exquisite style reflects the decadence the story thematizes. Though his hyperaesthetic descriptions can seem old-fashioned, Nugent wasn't merely collecting fin-de-siècle symbols and relics. Recurrent ellipses heighten the cinema-like stream-of-consciousness and mimick the couple's breathless exertions.[23] Instead of marking time (as punctuation usually does), the ellipses extend toward infinity like an endless pleasure voyage: "As they undressed by the blue dawn . . . Alex knew he had never seen a more perfect being . . . his body was all symmetry and music . . . and Alex called him Beauty . . . long they lay . . . blowing smoke and exchanging thoughts [. . .] Alex slept . . . and dreamed. . . ."[24] The story's black and white characters appear vague and luminous in a Vaseline-on-the-lens way. The black Alex and white Beauty seem to exist out of time, as though lifted out of the present by the eroticism of their encounter and returned to a Beardsleyesque decadent past: "He was in a field . . . a field of blue smoke and black poppies and red calla lilies . . . he was searching . . . on his hands and knees . . . searching . . . among black poppies and red calla lilies . . . he was searching and pushed aside poppy stems . . . and saw two strong white legs . . . dancer's legs . . . the contours pleased him . . . his eyes wandered . . . on past the muscular hocks to the firm white thighs . . . the rounded buttocks . . . then the lithe narrow waist . . . strong torso and broad deep chest . . . the heavy shoulders. . . ."[25] Just beyond Beauty's idealized masculine body, Alex discovers an equally arousing female one with "fragile firm breasts . . . graceful slender throat."[26] He kisses Melva, and she reminds him that "one *can* love two at the same time."[27] Then he wakes.

Alex's bisexual dream vision establishes an equality between his desires that his waking consciousness rejects. Freud announced at the turn of the century that repressed wishes surface in our dreams, and at first glance this seems a plausible explanation for what is going on in Nugent's tale. Yet such

an interpretation would turn "Smoke, Lillies and Jade" into a conventional tale of the closet, which is exactly what it isn't. Rather, the story presents Beauty and Melva as Alex's beloved pair, his yin-yang lovers between whom he doesn't *want* to choose. He thinks of them as complementary in every way—male and female, black and white. On one hand, the male Beauty is like Buddha to him, while on the other, "he was in love with Melva."[28] To choose one would be to deny the other. Better to reconcile them: "They were both so perfect . . . such complements . . . yes he would like Beauty to know Melva because he loved them both."[29] The solution he proposes is to keep them both in his life.

Surprisingly, Nugent constructed this panic-free bisexuality by repurposing the shell of a decadent nightmare. In fact, Alex's queer-positive dream is a rewriting of a corresponding scenario in *À Rebours*'s famous erotic dream sequence. In chapter 8 of Huysmans's novel, Des Esseintes is overwhelmed by exotic flowers as he reaches out to touch a naked woman. All of a sudden, obstructive black amorphophalli (flowers named after the misshapen penises they resemble) shoot up around him.[30] Repulsed, Des Esseintes beats back the plants to reach the woman. But he has a sudden change of heart: now, the woman is repulsive to him, and as she lunges toward him he fends off her amorous embraces. Seizing him, she displays her genitals to him. Appalled, to Des Esseintes the erotic feminine spectacle proves much more terrifying than the masculine amorphophalli. This is a classic portrait of the *vagina dentata*, and Huysmans's misogynist account of female genitalia as a "fearsome, bleeding little nest gaping between her thighs ringed with sabre blades" doesn't spare the reader.[31] Shocked by the thought of touching her "hideous wound," Des Esseintes promptly awakes. "Ah! Thank God, it was only a dream."[32]

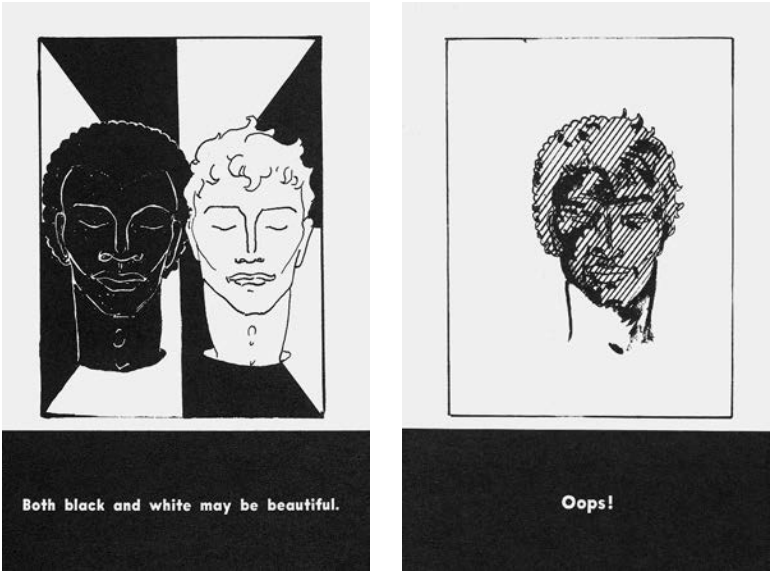
Nugent's story recast Huysmans's iconic flower-filled scene of hetero- and homosexual panic into one of utopian bisexual pleasure. Alex's dream, while indebted to Des Esseintes's, is conspicuously untroubled by misogyny or queer fears. This demonstrates Nugent's iconoclasm and suggests how much more seriously his engagement with literary traditions needs to be taken. When we consider the decadent background and cinematic modernity of Nugent's prose, the suspicious readings advanced by some are difficult to sustain.[33] The notion that Nugent was closeted or self-censoring becomes more precarious still when we consider how readily the story licenses Alex's desires, merely paying lip service to a feeling of shame as fleeting as a puff of cigarette smoke: "Alex felt warm . . . with shame . . . or was

it shame . . . he reached across Beauty for a cigarette."[34] It isn't difficult to see the emotion's flimsiness. Though the mention of "shame" momentarily projects the story back to the nineteenth century (when the term was a euphemism for love between men), the story amply compensates by devoting several pages to high-spirited homoeroticism.

But why invoke shame at all? Because of its decadent credentials. Like a wink at the cognoscenti, it's a fleeting gesture to Lord Alfred Douglas's 1894 poem "Two Loves," where Shame's "cheeks were wan and white like pallid lilies," Douglas writes, and "his lips were red like poppies."[35] Nugent's disingenuous "shame" is artful peekaboo: a transparent literary allusion that reveals more than it covers. Here again, the story simultaneously signals the way it is in conversation with decadence but skillfully positions itself beyond the reach of typical nineteenth-century sexual anxieties. For shameless Nugent, Alex's "shame" is reduced to a literary fig leaf that barely conceals the story's forward-looking sexual politics.

Nugent uses this tactic at other key moments, too. In 1930, Nugent's Salome series playfully eroticized biblical figures in vibrant watercolors.[36] The Salome myth appealed to his sensibilities as much as it did to Wilde's and Aubrey Beardsley's. Four years earlier, Nugent was already thinking of *Salome*. When Alex looked at Beauty, Nugent wrote, "he always thought of that passage from Wilde's Salome . . . when he looked at Beauty's lips . . . I would kiss your lips . . . he *would* like to kiss Beauty's lips."[37] Alex translates Salome's desirous words to John the Baptist—"Je baiserai ta bouche, Iokanaan. Je baiserai ta bouche," she says in Wilde's play—and repeats them, making them his own and embodying her transgressive sexual power.[38]

In the last scene of Wilde's play, Salome receives John the Baptist's head on a silver charger. The English illustrator Aubrey Beardsley called this "The Climax" when he drew it to accompany *Salome*. Nugent admired Beardsley's inky Japanese-decadent style. He owned several of the English artist's first editions.[39] Nugent's work as an illustrator, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, shows the influence of Beardsley's stark aesthetic. For instance, the lynching Nugent portrayed in *Opportunity* in January 1928 was one of many drawings that reoriented Beardsley's characteristic black-and-white swirls and ogees in the service of exuberant, energetic, and tragic works with overt racial and sexual themes.[40] He retooled Beardsley's decadent style in *Drawings for Mulattoes* (1927–28), a stark celebration of the queer mulatto who is black and white, man and woman, as well as in his sensual *Harlem Sophisticate* (1930).[41]



Richard Bruce Nugent Papers, JWJ MSS 92, ser. 6, box 51, "Black Studies Primer." *Black Studies Primer* (New York: NAACP, n.d.).

The cultural power of the American anti-miscegenation laws that were instituted in the 1860s (and abolished in 1967) can be gauged by the 1969 NAACP's *Black Studies Primer*, which Nugent illustrated. To accompany the pamphlet's declaration that "both black and white may be beautiful," Nugent drew two male heads posed side by side as if in an aesthetic arithmetic primer—one black, one white, both beautiful.[42] But turn the page and Nugent's drawing of an attractive mixed-race man presents race mixing as a mistake. "Oops!" the caption reads. No doubt this was Nugent's cheeky way of making light of an idea he personally despised. He makes his preferences clear in "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" by describing in detail the interracial kiss between Alex and Beauty. When he came to illustrate it, he made a color drawing of a nude man kissing another's lips and framed the pair with black poppies and red calla lilies. The drawing was not reproduced in *Fire!!*, but, nearly a century later, it was chosen for the cover of *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance*, one of the first books celebrating Nugent's work.

In "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," Nugent's lyrical description of the kiss lingers

and spreads over several pages. At the moment of Alex's most intense pleasure, he sings out the refrain from Langston Hughes's poem "Fire":

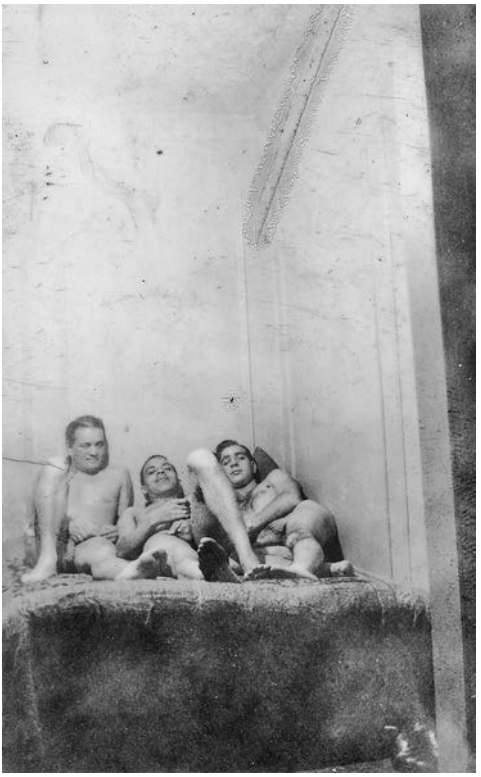
> I ain't been good,
> I ain't been clean—
> I been stinkin', low-down, mean.
> . . . . . .
> I been stealin'
> Been tellin' lies,
> Had more women than Pharaoh had wives.
>
> Fire,
> Fire, Lord!
> Fire gonna burn ma soul![43]

Hughes's spiritual may be magnificently unrepentant about its sexual excess, but its boasts remain safely heterosexual. Nugent, by contrast, composed a bold duet that combines Hughes's straight man's song with Alex's jubilant queer voice:

> Langston's spiritual . . . Fy-ah-fy-ah- Lawd . . . fy-ah's gonna burn ma soul . . . Beauty's hair was so black and curly . . . [. . .] Langston had written the words [. . .] Beauty's lips had pressed hard . . . cool . . . cool . . . fy-ah Lawd . . . his breath had trembled . . . fy-ah's gonna burn ma soul [. . .] there was Catherine . . . she was beautiful tonight . . . she always was at night . . . Beauty's lips . . . fy-ah Lawd [. . .] Beauty's body had pressed close . . . close [. . .] He felt the bed sink as Beauty lay beside him . . . his lips were dry . . . hot [. . .] Beauty's lips touched his . . . pressed hard . . . cool [. . .] Alex trembled . . . could feel Beauty's body . . . close against his . . . hot . . . tense . . . white . . .[44]

The melodic interplay of their counterpointed song builds to the story's joyful crescendo. Nugent's finely balanced climax escapes either-or logic by sliding back and forth between heterosexual and homosexual pleasure, between black and white bodies. There could be no more fitting aesthetic representation of the story's animating central principle that "one *can* love two at the same time" than this lyric celebration.[45]

In Yale's Beinecke Library, there's an intimate photograph of Nugent with two other men that demonstrates that when it came to his private life, Nugent did more than dream. The character he called Beauty was not a dream,



Bruce Nugent and two other men lying nude on a bed. Courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

either: he was based on a Panamanian kitchen employee with whom Nugent had fallen in love while working as a bellhop at the Martha Washington hotel.[46] Over the years, Nugent would embroider the tale in conversations, claiming he had followed the man back to Panama, lived with him, worked his way to Cuba, and finally been sent back to New York. Whether or not these stories are true, they testify to Nugent's tendency to air affairs of the heart and to commingle his personal life with his writing.

Nugent's dream proved so suggestive that when he shared it with his roommate of two years, Wallace Thurman, he wanted to write about it too. By the age of twenty-four, Thurman had edited *Fire!!* and was extremely well read, citing ancient classics as well as German and French literature as part of his formation.[47] He was well placed to appreciate the resonances in

his roommate's story. In *Infants of the Spring*, Thurman's 1932 roman à clef about the youngest members of the Harlem Renaissance, he rewrote Nugent's dream of Beauty:

> I lay down and went to sleep. I was dreaming a poignant, excruciatingly beautiful dream. I was in a flower garden, canopied by spreading oaks, and perfumed by fresh magnolia blossoms. The soil was pungent and black. An assortment of rarely beautiful flowers formed a many colored blanket. White lilies, red lilies, pale narcissi, slender orchids, polychromatic pansies, jaundiced daffodils, soporific lotus blossoms. I was in Eden. [. . .] Above my head a bevy of full throated rush carolled sweetly, insinuatingly. I lay down. Then I became aware of a presence. An ivory body exuding some exotic perfume. Beauty dimmed my eyes. The physical nearness of that invisible presence called to me, lured me closer. And as I crept nearer, the perfume pervaded my nostrils, inflamed my senses, anesthetized my brain. My hand reached out and clutched a silken forelock. Involuntarily my eyes closed and I was conscious of being sucked into it until there was a complete merging. For one brief moment I experienced supreme ecstasy. Then the garden disappeared.[48]

Accusations of plagiarism flew. Nugent said that Thurman had taken ideas from his unpublished novel, *Gentleman Jigger*. An academic consensus now supports Nugent's accusation.[49]

However, the real interest of this case lies in the reasons why both men wanted to lay claim to this dream. What was it about this oneiric montage that made it so vital and significant that Thurman needed to have it in his book? And what does the squabble reveal about their shared investment in nineteenth-century culture? Both of their fictional dream sequences captured what early twentieth-century gay sex was *not*. Both are filmic utopias constructed in stark opposition to desperate realities Thurman and Nugent knew only too well. Both enjoyed "rough trade" but also chose to marry women.[50] Nugent's sexual preferences were an open secret, but Thurman's homosexual self-loathing was so intense that he tried to stay on the down-low. Despite his efforts at discretion, Thurman was arrested in a New York City lavatory for illicit sexual activity in 1925.[51]

Thurman was never as comfortable about his sexuality as Nugent was. It was convenient (and maybe even psychologically necessary) for him to pin his erotic dreams on a barely veiled version of Nugent, a roommate whose decadent sympathies were so close to his that he felt entitled to appropriate them. "I think that Oscar Wilde is the greatest man that ever lived. Huys-

mans' Des Esseintes is the greatest character in literature, and Baudelaire is the greatest poet," Paul Arbian declares in *Infants of the Spring*.[52] Thurman made up the yellow-skinned dandy's name (Arbian) from the sound of Richard Bruce Nugent's initials (RBN). He dressed Arbian in disheveled clothes and no underwear.[53] He made Arbian an artist who draws "highly colored phalli," quotes from "The Decay of Lying," and invites himself to visit the Italian decadent poet Gabriele D'Annunzio.[54] Arbian is writing a novel dedicated to "Huysmans' Des Esseintes and Oscar Wilde's Oscar Wilde. Ecstatic Spirits with whom I cohabit and whose golden spores of decadent pollen I shall broadcast and fertilize."[55] In contrast, Thurman's alter ego in the novel, Raymond Taylor, is ambivalent and tortured.[56] Neurotic and blocked, he can't write his own novel.

Likewise, Thurman's novel virtually buckles under the weight of its internal contradictions and sexual panic. Contrary to Nugent's mock shame (his peekaboo fig leaf flaunting the decadence in "Smoke, Lillies and Jade"), Thurman's shame is only too real. It intrudes into the narrative, disrupts it, and ultimately converts the dream into a nightmare. When Arbian tells the members of the Niggerati about his dream, he makes no bones about his bisexuality. "After all," he says, "there are no sexes, only sex majorities, and the primary function of the sex act is enjoyment." Arbian's admission that he enjoys sex with men as much as sex with women is greeted with raucous laughter.[57] "No matter how bizarre a personality he may develop," one character explains, "his chances for excessive notoriety à la Wilde are slim. Thus the exaggerated poses and extreme mannerisms."[58] Thurman's authorial choices conspired to shame the novel's most decadent character.[59] By displacing queer sexuality onto this risible persona, Thurman circumscribed it and created a *cordon sanitaire* around it.

This was but an early twentieth-century update on a homophobic fin-de-siècle tactic. Back in 1892, Max Nordau's *Degeneration* had chastised Wilde along similar lines, diagnosing his "queer costumes" and "personal eccentricities" as symptoms of a "hysterical craving to be noticed."[60] Nordau's model of pernicious satire proved instructive to those troubled by the decadent nonconformity of those around them. In Thurman's version, Arbian's queer dream soon turns into a homophobic nightmare. The novel ridicules Arbian, killing him off in the final scene. Thurman's authorial gesture—*Mock the decadent! Kill the queer!*—is a textbook homosexual panic reflex.

On the novel's final page, Thurman portrays Arbian's meticulously composed suicide, a scene that resembles Jacques-Louis David's eighteenth-

century painting *The Death of Marat*, with the scribe murdered in his bath, pen and paper in hand. For his last performance, Arbian dons a crimson robe and a batik turban, perfumes the bathroom with incense, and carefully tiles the floor with his unpublished manuscript, *Wu Sing: The Geisha Man*. Then he lowers himself into a full bath and slits "his wrists with a highly ornamented Chinese dirk."[61] There is bathos to this bloody bathtub scene: Arbian intended it as "delightful publicity to precede the posthumous publication of his novel," but it goes comically wrong when the tub overflows, soaking his magnum opus and rendering it illegible.[62] His life's work destroyed, Arbian lives and dies a laughingstock.

Two years after publishing *Infants of the Spring*, Thurman died. He was thirty years old. Meanwhile, Nugent lived on, and so did his *Geisha Man* manuscript, complete with its portrait of a *Salome*-reading Wilde enthusiast.[63] The years have turned the manuscript's pages golden tan, but it only shows a few signs of water damage. The long stretches of flowing cursive suggest a self-assured compositional process. At times, Nugent's punctuation is unusual: not only does he use those time-stretching ecstatic ellipses familiar from "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," but he also extends them with dashes.[64] Like little pointers on the page signaling the reader to look, they draw attention to his inventive representation of time. In some of the excerpts that have been published, however, Nugent's punctuation has been regularized—an editorial decision reminiscent of the one taken by Emily Dickinson's first editors, who omitted the spiky, unpredictable dashes in her manuscript and thus made her published poetry appear more conventional than it actually is.

That could be the end of this story of intertwined lives and decadent fictions, but the 2002 publication of *Gentleman Jigger*, the novel Nugent wrote between 1928 and 1933, provides another peculiar twist to the drama. This is because the novel revealed that Nugent had been writing about his roommate too. It contains an entire chapter on Thurman's early life and family in Salt Lake City.[65] In Nugent's unflattering fictionalization, Thurman's alter ego smokes, drinks, and learns "that his mission in life is to rape little girls. He did. And possessing imagination, he experimented with little boys."[66] After taking a series of editorial jobs, he becomes "one of America's most promising Negro upstarts."[67]

Gentleman Jigger dramatizes a discussion of mutual plagiarism that likely originated in a real conversation. When asked whether he uses the Nugent character's words, the Thurman character replies defensively, "No, I don't. I merely use an idea."

"So you use my very words?" the Nugent character says.

"Only in one sentence. How can we help sounding like each other when we are both writing about the same time and the same people?"

"After I remind you about them," the Nugent character responds. "Sounds like plagiarism, I'm afraid."[68]

There's a Wildean whiff to this exchange that recalls the rivalry he shared with the painter James McNeill Whistler. As legend has it, Wilde complimented Whistler on one of his witticisms by telling him, "I wish I had said that, Jimmy." Wise to Wilde's tendency to plagiarize, Whistler wearily replied, "You will, Oscar, you will."[69]

This trail of recriminations about literary kleptomania is a clue to preoccupations this particular set of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century authors shared. Fiction and criticism gave queer decadents alternative lives and enabled them to reshape realities to suit them. "The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography," Wilde insisted in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[70] Much of Wilde's criticism—from "Pen, Pencil and Poison" to "The Portrait of Mr. W.H."—illustrates his aphorism. It's no coincidence that his performative prose became the chief model for the next generation of alternative writers. Queer black modernist writers, such as Nugent and Thurman, linked their stories together with the lives of their precursors because it gave their identities a place in the literary world that the real world did not afford them. I mention this to highlight the importance of paying attention to these overlooked intergenerational and intercultural decadent legacies. "Just as life-writing has been the missing person of modernism, so autobiografiction has been missed by historians of sexuality or queer theorists," the critic Max Saunders explains.[71] The genre known as autobiografiction crops up when "auto/biography itself cannot be kept entirely apart from fiction."[72]

Sometime between 1928 and 1934, Thurman had a lucid dream. "I had a rather unusual experience the other day," Thurman told his friend Harold Jackman.

I read the life of Oscar Wilde by Frank Harris—Then *De Profundis*— then Conrad's letters—edited by Aubry. I then went back to *De Profundis* and cried over it all last Sunday morning.[73]

Now don't start "psyching" me. It wasn't <u>that</u>. It was just that I suddenly had what Jean Toomer might call a cosmic vision of all artists as Matthew Arnold said

> of Shelley—futilely beating their wings in the luminous void. If real artists do that—how awful must be the face of folks like myself not exactly burned by the magic fire of genius, but nevertheless scorched.[74]

For both Nugent and Thurman, Beauty's body was androgynous and interracial. They aspired to sensuality and communion. The oneiric sequences in their fiction unspool like a queer dream deferred: a fantasia of love, tenderness, passion, affection, and emotion projected into the past because it cannot exist in the present.

In 1981, Nugent was seventy-five and living in a messy apartment in Hoboken, New Jersey. That summer, a bespectacled young writer from the other side of the country sent him a neat, typewritten letter. "I am a (white) gay man who is involved in uncovering and cherishing the historical roots of the Gay community I live in," Eric Garber wrote from San Francisco.[75] Garber was twenty-six, half a century younger than Nugent. He was stretching out a hand across time. By reaching out to Nugent, he wanted to bridge the divides that had kept the stories of men like them secret. "How did you manage to write such an up-front story as 'Smoke, Lilies and Jade' in 1926?" he asked.[76] He had read everything available about "the Black Gay experience" and had encountered nothing like it. He soon became evangelical about the story, lending out his precious Xerox copy of it to friends like a zealot sharing his Bible. Garber knew that the early twentieth century had been meaningful for white homosexuals, but he "wondered if the same was true for the Black community."[77] Until then, little had been done to recover the experiences of homosexuals of color. By the end of the decade, recovery projects were underway.

"I'd like to know some of the reactions you got from writing 'Smoke, Lilies and Jade,'" Garber said, citing Alain Locke as one of the people who most interested him, since he "was both a homosexual and an extremely well educated man."[78] Locke was the Harlem Renaissance's fairy godmother (in every sense of that expression). He was not, however, a decadent. When the story appeared in *Fire!!*, Nugent and Thurman both got burned.[79] He had been supportive of Thurman and Nugent many times before, but now he drew the line precisely because he knew what their decadent literary credentials symbolized.[80]

Locke's *Survey* magazine review belittled Nugent's story by calling it a "hectic imitation of the 'naughty nineties'" with "effete echoes of contem-

Photograph of Eric Garber, in Robert Giard Papers, box 208, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Photo by Robert Giard copyright Estate of Robert Giard.

porary decadence."[81] He recommended that young Harlem refrain from depicting sensuality and favor "the clean" instead. He fretted that "the strong sex radicalism of many of the contributors" to *Fire!!* would brand them. Finally, he suggested that Nugent should have gone "back to Whitman [because it] would have been a better point of support than a left-wing pivoting on Wilde and Beardsley." He chastised Nugent for rattling the closet door as loudly as his decadent precursors had, rather than preferring Whitman's discretion. To Locke, back to the closet would be best. It was a damning assessment by the foremost African American cultural gatekeeper.

"To us," Nugent explained, "Locke was the Dictator of how things should go."[82] But he was not about to change to please him. Nugent's attitude, even in the 1920s, was "if you can't take me the way I am, it's your problem. It's certainly not mine."[83] Nugent said, "Locke had decided that he had his finger

on the pulse of every black person who was doing anything. [. . .] Almost everybody listened to his dictates, except Wally [Thurman] and me."[84]

Autobiografiction gave them the means to evade Locke's attempts at censorship. Soon Thurman was faithfully paraphrasing Locke's critique of *Fire!!* in *Infants of the Spring*, where Locke appears as the "small, dapper" Europeanized leader of the Harlem Renaissance around whom the young Niggerati gather.[85] At his literary salon, he warns them that he is "fearful of the decadent strain which seems to have filtered into most of your work. [. . .] You must not, like your paleface contemporaries, wallow in the mire of post Victorian license. You have too much at stake."[86]

Though Locke was not supportive of Nugent's artistic approach, he was not indifferent to Nugent himself. Two years after his damning *Survey* critique, he sent Nugent a signed photograph.[87] "Out of my own sorrow I'm quite sure I know what you have suffered," Locke told Nugent, "and look forward to warming my own soul a bit at the fire of your youth."[88] Nugent explained what Locke meant by this many years later. "Locke offered me his body. A professor of philosophy and a person old enough to be your father doesn't lie on a bed in their shorts and say, 'Do anything you want.' "[89]

In the 1920s and 1930s, when Nugent was a young man, Christopher Street, in Greenwich Village, was one of the city's few gay-dominated areas.[90] Stewart's and the Life Cafeteria were two notorious bohemian hangouts that catered to gay men and straight gawkers.[91] A 1933 news report called Christopher Street at Sheridan Square a notorious "gathering spot for that nocturnal clan, the third sexers. Dykes, fags, pansies, lesbians and others of that unfortunate ilk convene there nightly, parading their petty jealousies and affairs of the heart."[92] Nugent profiled the scene in the late 1930s and described it as "a mad bohemia that outdid any of those on the continent," a mecca for artists, the eccentric, and the amorous.[93]

In its heyday, Thurman claimed that Harlem was "almost a Negro Greenwich Village."[94] In the last chapter of *Infants of the Spring*, Paul Arbian, Nugent's alter ego, lives and dies in "a malodorous, jerry-built tenement" near Christopher Street.[95] Thurman's choice of location could hardly have been more symbolic. While Thurman's stand-in, Raymond Taylor, makes the long subway journey from Harlem to Christopher Street, at the opposite end of Manhattan, he reflects that Arbian had "wooed the unusual, cultivated artificiality, defied all conventions of dress and conduct."[96] But Taylor has not been so rebellious, or so brave. The locale Arbian called home proves unfa-

miliar and disorienting to him: he hesitates as he exits the subway, and he struggles to find his way amid the "maze" surrounding Christopher Street.[97] The scene's queer symbolism captures the tension between Nugent's and Thurman's sexual styles: the one at ease with his homosexuality, the other lost in the labyrinth of the down-low.

Decades later, in the summer of 1969, Christopher Street became the site of one of the most important events in twentieth-century queer American history. Located just around the corner from where Arbian supposedly died, the Stonewall Inn, a small, brick-fronted gay bar, was raided by four hundred police officers wearing helmets, face masks, and bulletproof vests and carrying shields and nightsticks.[98] The Stonewall Inn riots that ensued became a lightning rod for the organization of the American gay rights movement. The Beat poet Allen Ginsberg commented that "the guys there [on Christopher Street] were so beautiful," but the incipient movement changed gay men almost overnight. "They've lost that wounded look that fags all had ten years ago," Ginsberg said.[99] All except one: Bruce Nugent never wore that look.

Nugent was an *enfant terrible* who grew up and grew old—so old, in fact, that he became the last surviving member of the Harlem Renaissance. At seventy-nine, he still had an eye for young men. But, he confessed with a laugh, "they don't have an eye for me."[100] When he was threatened with eviction, Nugent narrowly escaped homelessness because of a New Jersey prohibition against evicting senior citizens for the purpose of turning a building into condos. In the 1980s, when he was interviewed for the first black gay anthology, *In the Life*, Nugent said he owed his survival to friends, "social security and brunches."[101]

Nugent died of congestive heart failure on 27 May 1987. Two years later, his friend Eric Garber published the essay he'd written as a result of their conversations. Garber described the story that had first brought Nugent to his attention as though its significance was equivalent to Wilde's 1895 defense of "the love that dare not speak its name" from the courtroom dock. "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," Garber wrote, was a "defence of homosexual love [that] became the first published essay on homosexuality by an Afro-American."[102] "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" also deserves recognition as a defense of bisexuality.

Around this time the filmmaker Isaac Julien became interested in gay genealogies. He wanted to reclaim Langston Hughes as one of the "few 'out'

ancestors."[103] The Hughes estate objected to this revisionist reading of Hughes's "official" history. The critic Hilton Als, who collaborated on Julien's script, described Hughes as "one of the architects of black political correctness, [because] he saw as threatening any attempt to expose black difference or weakness in front of a white audience"—despite his "enigmatic" personal relationships.[104]

Looking for Langston was released in 1989. One of the ways Julien circumvented the estate's injunction was by making Nugent's autobiografiction a critical scene in the film. The erotic dream sequence from "Smoke, Lillies and Jade" provided the narrative thread for the film's stylish meditation on the early twentieth-century black gay experience. Julien's film has a two-way action: it exhumes an early twentieth-century black gay history and brings it to life for a new, late twentieth-century audience. It oscillates between then and now. In doing so, Julien also captured Nugent's own double vision: his avant-garde dream of interracial love between men, a vision indebted to decadent precursors like Wilde, Douglas, Huysmans, and Beardsley. *Looking for Langston* won the 1989 Teddy Award at the Berlin International Film Festival, an honor dedicated to recognizing outstanding queer films.

"I'll wait," Beauty whispered to his lover in Nugent's 1926 story. When the actor playing Beauty in Julien's film whispered these words in 1989, he was signaling that Nugent's time had finally come.

Notes

1. Richard Bruce Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, ed. Thomas H. Wirth (Philadelphia: Da Capo, 2008), 299.

2. Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, 294.

3. Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, 294, 234.

4. Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, 290.

5. Richard Bruce Nugent, *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent*, ed. Thomas H. Wirth (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002), xi.

6. Bruce Nugent, interview by Eric Garber, quoted in Eric Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (London: Penguin, 1990), 323–24.

7. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 268.

8. Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, 293.

9. Beyond the obvious racial politics of the literary history I've sketched here, another possible reason for Nugent's exclusion may be that his contributions were partly embodied: we sometimes find them in the details of how he lived, rather than

in his published works. Like Wilde, he put more of his genius into his life than into his art. Two studies of Nugent's work buck the trend of excluding him from modernist history: Joseph Allen Boone, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1998); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-Garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015).

10. Langston Hughes, "Our Wonderful Society: Washington," *Opportunity* 5, no. 8 (Aug. 1927): 226.

11. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 7.

12. Bruce Nugent, interview by Thomas H. Wirth, quoted in Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 7.

13. Nugent, interview by Wirth, quoted in Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 9.

14. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 76.

15. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 76.

16. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 77.

17. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 78.

18. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 77.

19. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 80.

20. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 3, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 3–4.

21. Wilde, *Complete Works*, 3:55.

22. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 78.

23. David A. Gerstner describes the story as "an elliptical . . . montage of fragmented and disjointed scenes that unfold while enveloping space and time" that "reveals the modernist-experimental tendencies of the period's avant-garde films." *Queer Pollen: White Seduction, Black Male Homosexuality, and the Cinematic* (Chicago: U Illinois P, 2011), 22, 31.

24. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 82; bracketed ellipses are my own.

25. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 82.

26. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 83.

27. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 87.

28. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 82.

29. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 82.

30. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, ed. Nicholas White, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 80.

31. My translation. In the original French, Huysmans describes the scene like this: "Il fit un effort surhumain pour se dégager de ses étreintes, mais d'un geste irrésistible, elle le retint, le saisit et, hagard, il vit s'épanouir sous les cuisses à l'air, le farouche Nidularium qui bâillait, en saignant, dans des lames de sabre." Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours*, ed. Daniel Mortier (Paris: Pocket, 1999), 139.

32. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 81.

33. Bryan Glavey discusses Nugent's ellipses as a "sort of typography of the closet." *Wallflower Avant-Garde*, 79.

34. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 83.

35. Quoted in Chris White, *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999), 55.

36. They are reproduced as color plates in Nugent, *Gay Rebel*.

37. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 82–84.

38. Oscar Wilde, *Salomé: Drame en un acte* (Paris: Librairie de L'Art Indépendant, 1893), 33.

39. J. Edgar Bauer, "On the Transgressiveness of Ambiguity: Richard Bruce Nugent and the Flow of Sexuality and Race," *Journal of Homosexuality* 62, no. 8 (2015): 47–48.

40. The illustration appeared in *Opportunity* in January 1928 and is reprinted in Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 247.

41. These images are reproduced in Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 157. For a discussion of them, see Elisa Glick, *Materializing Queer Desire: Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 2009), 94–99.

42. NAACP, *Black Studies Primer* (New York: NAACP, 1969).

43. Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Vintage, 1994), 117. The poems Hughes wrote between 1921 and 1930, at the beginning of his career, bear witness to his decadent influences. "Aesthete in Harlem" (1931) marvels at the peculiarity "That in this nigger place, / I should meet Life face to face / When for years, I had been seeking / Life in places gentler speaking" (128). See also "Parisian Beggar Woman," "I Thought It Was Tangiers I Wanted," "For Salome," and "To Beauty."

44. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 84–85.

45. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 87.

46. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 11.

47. Eleonore van Notten, *Wallace Thurman's Harlem Renaissance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 83.

48. Wallace Thurman, *Infants of the Spring* (London: X Press, 1998), 23.

49. Notten's research on the matter strikes me as conclusive. Notten, *Wallace Thurman's Harlem Renaissance*, 288. Wirth examined the extant manuscript of *Gentleman Jigger* and "found only one manuscript fragment in Nugent's papers that tracks *Infants* verbatim—the letter that Paul Arbian sent to Gabriel D'Annunzio, which is quoted in *Infants*' last chapter." Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 163.

50. Thurman married Louise Thomson in 1928, and the marriage ended after six months. According to Thomson, the cause was Thurman's homosexuality. Nugent married Grace Marr in 1952 (she committed suicide in 1969).

51. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 26.

52. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 10.

53. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 8.

54. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 2, 159, 145.

55. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 186.

56. Elisa Glick calls Arbian "both male and female, innocent and corrupt, natural and artificial—a figure who delimits the horizon of both beginnings and endings because he embraces both, and neither." *Materializing Queer Desire*, 99.

57. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 24–25.

58. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 33.

59. Urmila Seshagiri reads Paul's suicide as pointing "to the inevitable self-destruction of a racially fragmented, aesthetically autonomous modern subject that cannot be assimilated into the very Victorian master narratives the novel critiques." *Race and the Modernist Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2010), 32.

60. Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, ed. George L. Mosse (Lincoln: U Nebraska P, 1993), 317.

61. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 186.

62. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 186.

63. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 95.

64. Compare the transcription on p. 95 of *Gay Rebel* with p. 111 of Nugent's *Geisha Man* Notebooks, ser. 2, box 18, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

65. See chap. 2, "Salt Lake City," in Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*.

66. Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, 17.

67. Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, 18.

68. Nugent, *Gentleman Jigger*, 166.

69. E. H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1979), 2:415.

70. Wilde, *Complete Works*, 3:167.

71. Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 23.

72. Saunders, *Self Impression*, 7.

73. The first expurgated edition of *De Profundis* was published in 1905, and a slightly enlarged edition appeared in 1908. A limited edition, published in 1913, included more material from the original manuscript. In 1949, Wilde's son, Vyvyan Holland, published Robert Ross's typescript. It was not until 1962 that a transcription from the original manuscript in the British Library was published.

74. Wallace Thurman Collection, JWJ MSS 12, ser. 1, Correspondence, box 1, folder 4: Jackson, Harold, 1928–34, n.d., Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

75. Letter from Eric Garber to Bruce Nugent, 20 May 1981, Richard Bruce Nugent Papers, JWJ MSS 92, ser. 1, Correspondence, 1941–87, box 6, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

76. Letter from Garber to Nugent, 20 May 1981.

77. Letter from Garber to Nugent, 20 May 1981.

78. Letter from Eric Garber to Bruce Nugent, 13 Oct. 1981, Richard Bruce Nugent Papers, JWJ MSS 92, ser. 1, Correspondence, 1941–87, box 6, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

79. In addition to editing the magazine, Thurman contributed a story about a Harlem prostitute told from the point of view of her john, "the guy who gimme ma' firs' two bucks." Zora Neale Hurston's story about domestic abuse appeared alongside Nugent's queer tale. See Wallace Thurman, "Cordelia the Crude," *Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists*, Nov. 1926, 6.

80. Locke had a number of eccentricities that might have made him supportive of the younger generation's decadent dreams had he been more open-minded. For a discussion of his time at Oxford and fascination with Wilde, see Michèle Mendelssohn, *Making Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 40–42.

81. Alain Locke, "Fire: A Negro Magazine," *Survey*, no. 58, 15 Aug.–15 Sept. 1927.

82. "Hughes & Locke," box 21, ser. 2, Poems, short works of fiction and nonfiction, interviews, 1920s–1985, Richard Bruce Nugent Papers, JWJ MSS 92.

83. Charles Michael Smith, "Harlem Renaissance Bohemian," *New York Native*, 23 Mar. 1987.

84. Smith, "Harlem Renaissance Bohemian."

85. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 152.

86. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 152.

87. The signed 1929 photograph from Alain Locke to Bruce Nugent is now in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, box 88, ser. 11, Photographs, 1880s–1986, Richard Bruce Nugent Papers, JWJ MSS 92.

88. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 25.

89. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 24.

90. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 167.

91. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 166–67.

92. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 167.

93. Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 147.

94. Wallace Thurman, *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader*, ed. Amritjit Singh and Daniel M. Scott (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003), 62.

95. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 185.

96. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, 184.

97. Turman, *Infants of the Spring*, 184.

98. James Stuart Olson, *Historical Dictionary of the 1970s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 169.

99. Olson, *Historical Dictionary*, 169.

100. Smith, "Harlem Renaissance Bohemian."
101. Smith, "Harlem Renaissance Bohemian."
102. Garber, "Spectacle in Color," 330.
103. Hilton Als, "The Sojourner," *New Yorker*, 23 Feb. and 2 Mar. 2015, 172.
104. Als, "Soujourner," 172.

This page intentionally left blank

Contributors

HOWARD J. BOOTH is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Manchester. He is the General Editor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Fiction of E. M. Forster* (2007), for which he will edit *Maurice*; the coeditor of *Modernism and Empire* (2000); the editor of *New D. H. Lawrence* (2009) and *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling* (2011); and the author of many articles and chapters on late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and culture.

JOSEPH BRISTOW is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. His recent books include (with Rebecca N. Mitchell) *Oscar Wilde's Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of Forgery* (2015) and an edited collection, *Oscar Wilde and the Cultures of Childhood* (2017). He is a coeditor of *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism*.

ELLEN CROWELL is an associate professor of English at Saint Louis University. Her publications include *Aristocratic Drag: The Dandy in Irish and American Southern Fiction* (2007) and articles in *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Eire-Ireland*, *BRANCH: Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-Century History*, and *Neo-Victorian Studies*. Her current book project, *Oscar Wilde's Body*, reconstructs forgotten subcultures of mourning, fandom, and queer self-fashioning to reimagine Oscar Wilde's presence in the literary and cultural landscapes of early modernism.

NICK FREEMAN teaches English at Loughborough University, where he is Reader in Late-Victorian Literature. He has published widely on late Victorian literature and art and is the author of two monographs, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art 1870–1914* (2007) and *1895: Drama, Disaster and Disgrace in Late Victorian Britain* (2011). He recently edited Arthur Symons's *Spiritual Adventures* (2017).

ELLIS HANSON is a professor of English at Cornell University. He is the author of *Decadence and Catholicism* (1998) and is currently working on a book, *Exquisite Pain*, on aestheticism and suffering.

KATE HEXT is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Exeter. She is the author of *Walter Pater: Individualism and Aesthetic Philosophy* (2013), and her other publications include articles on Ben Hecht's "hard-boiled decadence" (*Modernist Cultures*) and the camp correspondence between Carl Van Vechten and Ronald Firbank (*Modernism/modernity*). She is currently writing a book about how the decadent movement influenced Hollywood cinema.

KIRSTEN MACLEOD is a lecturer at Newcastle University (UK). She is the author of *Fictions of British Decadence* (2006) and *American Little Magazines of the Fin de Siècle* (2018) and has published widely on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Anglo-American decadence, modernism, and periodicals. Currently her research focuses on Carl Van Vechten and archiving modernism. She has also edited a critical edition of Van Vechten's *The Blind Bow-Boy* (2018).

KRISTIN MAHONEY is an associate professor of English at Michigan State University. She has published essays on aestheticism and decadence in *Victorian Studies*, *Criticism*, *English Literature in Transition*, *Literature Compass*, *Nineteenth Century Prose*, *Victorian Review*, and *Victorian Periodicals Review*. She is the author of *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (2015) and is currently working on a project entitled *Queer Kinship after Wilde: Transnational Aestheticism and the Family*.

DOUGLAS MAO is a professor of English at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (1998) and *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860–1960* (2010), as well as the coeditor, with Rebecca Walkowitz, of *Bad Modernisms* (2006). He has been President of the Modernist Studies Association and is Series Editor of Hopkins Studies in Modernism.

MICHÈLE MENDELSSOHN is a literary critic and cultural historian whose research ranges from the late nineteenth century to the present day. She is an associate professor of English at the University of Oxford. Her research for the chapter in this book was made possible thanks to the Donald C. Gallup Fellowship at Yale University.

ALEX MURRAY is Senior Lecturer in Modern Literature at the Queen's University, Belfast. His most recent monograph is *Landscapes of Decadence: Literature and Place at the Fin de Siècle* (2016), and he coedited *Decadent Poetics* (2013). He is currently

editing *Decadence: A Literary History* for Cambridge University Press and writing a book on the intersection of aesthetics, politics, and the past at the fin de siècle.

SARAH PARKER is a lecturer in English at Loughborough University. Her first monograph is *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity, 1889–1930* (2013). Her other publications include articles and chapters on Constance Naden, Olive Custance, Amy Levy, and Djuna Barnes. An essay collection, *Michael Field: Decadent Moderns* (coedited with Ana Parejo Vadillo), is forthcoming in 2019 from Ohio University Press.

VINCENT SHERRY is the Howard Nemerov Professor in the Humanities and Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis. His books include *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (1993), *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003), and *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2015). He is the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (2005) and of the *Cambridge History of Modernism* (2017). He is currently writing *The European War of 1914–1918: A Literary History*, which is under contract with Princeton University Press.

This page intentionally left blank

Index

Page numbers in *italics* refer to figures.

Absalom, Absalom! (Faulkner), 1
Acton, Harold, 27, 40
aestheticism, 10, 15, 23, 227n76; in America, 16, 18, 22, 212; camp, 123, 246, 247n11; and humour, 119; in Lawrence, 181, 184, 190; in Leverson's novels, 36; and Millay, 138–39; and modernism, 21; and new decadence, 230, 234–35; relation to decadence, 11, 99–100, 220n10; and Sackville, 21; Victorian, 27; and women, 99–100
aesthetics: decadent and modernist, 2, 7, 12, 54; symbolist, 48, 54, 55–56
affective dissonance in *Salome,* 48–49, 54, 60
African American artists, 254–55
African American literature, 23, 251, 252, 267
Allan, Maud, 49; as Salome, 65, *66*
American decadence, 16–20, 22–23, 233, 246n4. *See also* Evans, Donald; Van Vechten, Carl
American modernism, 200
anachronism in Leverson's novels, 36
"anarchists," literary, 205, 206
androgyne, 19
anti-realism, 47, 56, 57
anti-realist aesthetic in theater, 47, 56–57
Apes of God, The (Lewis), 40–41, 42
Archer, William: on banning of *Salome,* 50, 51
À Rebours (Huysmans), 13, 19, 77, 169–70, 172, 234, 263, 271n31; parallels in "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" (Nugent), 255, 257
"art for art's sake," 5, 21, 71, 99
artificiality, 150, 172; in *Salome*, 57–58, 60; and the unnatural, 175
Audoux, Marguerite, 199
autobiografiction, 265, 268, 270
"Autumn" (Hulme), 107–8
avant-garde, 214; and aestheticism, 227n76; and decadence, 49, 215, 228n93; drama, 55, 58; masculinist, 27, 38, 40; minimalist, 51; "naughty" and "authentic," 217–18; post-decadent, 19
Axel's Castle (Wilson), 47–48

Ballin, Ada S., 98–99
Barnes, Djuna, 8, 18, 139–40, 161, 233; *The Book of Repulsive Women*, 18; "The Flowering Corpse," 139; and New York, 170; *Nightwood*, 18, 169, 170–71, 174–76
Barthes, Roland: on drift, 126–27
Baudelaire, Charles, 4; as a decadent, 144; in English translation, 142–43; as a "modern" poet, 21, 138, 142, 143–44, 145, 149; "Une Charogne," 54–55. See also *Fleurs du mal, Les* (Baudelaire); ventriloquism in Millay and Baudelaire
"Baudelaire and Decadence" (Murry), 143
Baughan, E. A.: on *Salome*, 57–58, 65
Beardsley, Aubrey: influence of, 1, 18, 37, 44n51, 252; and *Salome*, 258; *Under the Hill*, 121

Beardsley Period, The (Burdett), 13–14, 79
Beckett, Samuel, 161, 169, 176; *The Unnamable*, 171–72, 173–74
Beerbohm, Max, 29, 40, 44n29, 81; "Enoch Soames," 78–79; on Farr's *Salome*, 58–60; and Leverson, 30–31, 32; on Ricketts's *Salome*, 61–62; *Seven Men*, 78, 79, 80; *Zuleika Dobson*, 73
Benson, E. F., 15
Bergson, Henri, 172–73, 178n23. *See also* Bergsonian comedy
Bergsonian comedy, 174, 175, 176
Bernhardt, Sarah: and *Salome*, 50
Birth of Tragedy, The (Nietzsche), 181
bisexuality, 147, 230, 233, 241, 256–57, 263, 269
Black Mask, The (magazine), 17
black queer modernity, 23, 253. *See also* Nugent, Richard Bruce
Blind Bow-Boy, The (Van Vechten), 22, 231, 234, 236–37; aestheticism in, 237; and camp, 241; critical responses to, 243, 244–45; and homosexuality, 242–43; narrative mode in, 238; and new decadence, 238–40; and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde), 238; queerness in, 240–42, 245–46; shifts in perspective, 240
Bloom, Harold: on Firbank, 119, 133n2; on Lawrence, 181
Bloomsbury Set, 15, 40, 165
Blunt, Wilfred Scawen, 96–97
Boer War, 74, 163
Bohemia, 18, 232, 233, 241, 242, 254. *See also* Greenwich Village
Book of the Poets' Club, 109
Bourget, Paul, 126
Bower Alcock, Caterina, 158n56; translation of Baudelaire, 144
Bradbury, Malcolm, 78
Bradley, Katharine Harris. *See* Field, Michael (Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper)
Bridge, The (Crane), 19
Browning, Elizabeth Barrett, 100, 102
Bruno, Guido, 18, 170
Bruno's Weekly, 18–19
Buck, Mitchell S., 200
Buck in the Snow, The (Millay), 138–39
Bunston, Anna, 104
Burdett, Osbert, 13–14, 79
Bürger, Peter, 227n76
Burke, Claire, 199, *208*, 219n8
Byron, 184

"C33" (Crane), 18
Café Royal, 118, 236
Calinescu, Matei, 217, 228n93
Callirrhoë (Field), 90
camp, 2, 19–20, 123, 230–31, 234; in *The Blind Bow-Boy*, 241, 244; and decadence, 245, 247n11
camp aestheticism, 123, 246, 247n11
camp modernists, 27–28; and Leverson, 38, 39–40, 41, 42
canon: decadence's place in the modern(ist), 7–9; destabilized in *The Blind Bow-Boy*, 239; Firbank's place in, 119
Cartesian dualism, Lawrence's rejection of, 22, 182
Catholicism, 10, 73, 92, 113; and innuendo in Firbank, 130–32
Cave of the Golden Calf, 13, 73
Celtic Revival, 168
Chicago, 13, 17
Chicago Daily News, 17
Child, Harold Hannyngton: review of *The Flute of Sardonyx* (John), 75–77; review of *The Men of the Nineties* (Muddiman), 77–78, 79–80
Christopher Street, New York, 268–69
Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure (Carpenter), 185
Claire Marie Press, 22, 199, 218; linked with decadence, 202; "naughtiness" of, 215–16; publications and decadence, 199–200, 203–4, 205, 206; and *Tender Buttons* (Stein), 201–2, 203–4
colonialism, 122–23
comedy. *See* Bergsonian comedy; mechanical comedy
Compton-Burnett, Ivy, 15, 32
consciousness, shifting levels of: in Firbank, 129, 132–33
Cooper, Edith Emma. *See* Field, Michael (Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper)
Cornford, Frances, 104–5

Corvo, Baron, 10, 14
Coward, Noël, 20, 84
Crane, Hart, 18–19
Crome Yellow (Huxley), 15
Crowley, Aleister, 84
cubism, 202, 205, 207, 211

Daily Telegraph: on decadence and aestheticism, 71
dandy-aesthetes: in Leverson's novels, 34–36; in Leverson's stories, 28, 29–30; satirized in Saki, 83, 87–88n50
D'Annunzio, Gabrielle, 14
Daphne (Strauss), 187
"The Dead Praise Not Thee, O God" (Bunston), 104
decadence, difficulties of defining, 9–11
Decadent Style (Reed), 179
Degeneration (Nordau), 263
De Profundis (Wilde), 265, 273n73
Derrida, Jacques, 125
destinerrance, 125, 126
diabolism, 79
Dillon, George, 142, 145, 147, 148, 149, 151
Dionysus, 90
disease, decadence as, 73, 74, 76, 83–84, 85, 141
disgust as a response to *Salome*, 58, 59–60, 62
Dodge, Mabel, 205, 207; on Evans and Claire Marie, 202–3, 205, 211, 222n30
Dos Passos, John, 12, 16, 24n27
Douglas, James, 75, 86n28
Douglas, Lord Alfred, 83, 258
Dowson, Ernest, 73, 77
drama, 49, 51, 55, 56–58, 176
Dreiser, Theodore, 239

Eighteen Nineties, The (Jackson), 4, 79; focus on decadence, 74; and Max Beerbohm, 78
Eliot, T. S.: "Arnold and Pater," 5; and Barnes, 176; on Baudelaire, 142, 143–44; hostility to decadence, 5; "The Idea of a Literary Review," 45n62; and Millay, 138; *The Waste Land*, 5, 138, 144
elliptical indirect narration in Firbank, 121–22, 127–33
embodiment in Nugent, 270–71n9
empire, end of, 162, 163–65; in Joyce, 167–69
English Review, 37, 39, 40
ennui, 19, 138, 180, 231
epideictic style, 235, 239
Epstein, Jacob: Wilde monument, 1
eroticism, 16, 19; in Firbank, 130–33; "Hymn to Dionysus" (Sackville), 90; in Millay's Baudelaire, 145, 146; in Saki, 82; and translation as vampirism, 145; violent, 147–48, 152, 153
Études de moeurs et de critique sur les poètes latins de la décadence (Nisard), 4
Evans, Donald, 22, 197–98, *198*, 206, 210–11, 223–25n55; accused of fakery, 211–12; on Claire Marie, 202; and decadence, 213; *Ironica*, 209–10, 211; linked decadence with futurism and cubism, 207; and Amy Lowell, 212–13; *Nine Poems from a Valetudinarian*, 209; *Sonnets from the Patagonian*, 200, 201, 206–7, 207–8, 211–12, 215; *Two Deaths in the Bronx*, 208–9

Fantazius Mallare (Hecht and Smith), 13
Farr, Florence: production of *Salome*, 57–59
fascism, 18
fashion and Sackville, 92–95
Faulkner, William, 1–2
femininity: and decadence, 6, 40, 41; and poetry, 99, 103, 105, 113
feminism, 20, 136; and decadence, 28; and the Great War, 111–13; and Leverson, 28, 32; and Millay, 145–46, 152
Field, Michael (Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper), 10, 89–90, 103, 157n33
fin de siècle, 11, 161, 162; British, 1–2, 19; and Firbank, 121; memoirs of, 3–5, 84–85; modernism as antithetical to, 6–7; and twentieth-century writers, 15; and Van Vechten, 232, 233–34
Firbank, Ronald, 15, 21, 38, 118–19, 229; The *Artificial Princess*, 125–26; critical neglect of, 119–20; and decadent literature, 120; *The Flower Beneath the Foot*, 122, 127–29; *The New Rythum*, 121; nomadic life of, 121; novels of, 121–24, 125–26, 127–33; *Prancing Nigger*, 122, 123, 229; and "queerness," 230; *Sorrow in Sunlight*, 122–24; *Valmouth*, 121, 129–33

"Fire" (Langston Hughes), 260
Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists, 259, 261, 266–67
Fitzgerald, F. Scott, 16
Five Faces of Modernity (Calinescu), 217, 228n93
Flaubert, Gustave, 12, 19, 153
Flecker, James Elroy, 77, 87n34
Fleurs du mal, Les (Baudelaire), 4, 54; Millay's translation of, 21, 136, 142, 144–52; verse form in, 151–52
Flint, F. S., 108–9
Flute of Sardonyx, The (John), 75–77, 86n28
For Christmas MDCCCCVIII (Poets' Club), 106–7; reviewed by Flint, 108
Forster, E. M., 12–13, 181, 184
France: as origin of decadence, 4, 10, 78
free love and Millay, 136
free verse, 37, 108, 137, 138, 209; and translation, 151, 152
Fremstad, Olive: as Salome, 63, 64
Freud, Sigmund, 147, 256
futurism, 36–37, 205, 211; in Evans, 208–10, 223–24n55

Garber, Eric, 266, *267*; on "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" (Nugent), 269
Gautier, Théophile, 167
Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance (Nugent), 259
gender, 245; and nature, 187, 188, 189–90
gender ambiguity, 147–48, 156n21, 191, 231, 235, 245
gender division, 187, 189, 191
gender politics, 12, 31, 165, 186, 188, 190
Gilman, Richard, 10
Ginsberg, Allen, 269
Glyn, Elinor, 84
Golden Journey to Samarkand, The (Flecker), 77
Gosse, Edmund, 3
Great War, 3, 91, 163, 173; decadence following the, 14; and women, 111–13; writers' reactions to, 12–13
Greenwich Village, 18, 135, 137, 150, 170, 197, 268–69
Gribble, Francis: review of *The Eighteen Nineties* (Jackson), 74, 85n17

haiku, 109
Harlem Renaissance, 23, 251–53, 266, 269; and decadence, 233, 255, 258–59, 267–68
Harrison, Austin, 39
Harvard Monthly, 16
H.D., 19, 182
Hecht, Ben, 13, 17
hedonism and decadence, 4, 17, 72, 73, 84–85, 236–37
Hill of Dreams, The (Machen), 75, 86n25, 181
History of American Poetry, 1900–1940 (Gregory and Zaturenska), 197–98, 219n3
History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, The (Gibbon), 164
Holland, Vyvyan, 15, 38, 273n73
homoeroticism, 14–15, 21, *261*; in Firbank, 123, 127–29; in Millay, 138–39; in Nugent, 255, 256, 260, 270; of Pater, 4; in Saki, 82–83; of Wilde, 72
homosexuality, 19–20, 184, 230, 240–41, 244, 261–62; in *The Blind Bow-Boy*, 242–43; and end-of-empire decadence, 164–65, 167; and the Harlem Renaissance, 251–52, 268; modernist writers and, 123; and "shame," 257–58, 263
horror as a response to *Salome*, 63–64
Hughes, Langston, 254, 260, 269–70
Hughes, Spencer Leigh, 105
Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Pound), 5–6
Hugo, Victor, 4
Hulme, T. E., 106, 107–9
Huxley, Aldous, 15, 84
Huysmans, J. K., 4, 23, 175, 235. See also *À Rebours* (Huysmans)

Image, Selwyn, 106–7
imagism, 91, 96, 107–8, 143, 206
impersonality, 56, 111, 136–37
Importance of Being Earnest, The (Wilde), 32, 126, 199; Leverson's account of the first night, 38–39
Ireland: as British colony in *Ulysses*, 167, 168–69
Ives, George Cecil, 14

Jackson, Holbrook, 4, 74, 77, 78, 79
John, Edmund, 75–77, 86n28

jouissance, 127
Joyce, James, 161; and decadence, 166–67; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 166–67; *Ulysses*, 14, 166, 167–69, 239
Julien, Isaac, 269–70; *Looking for Langston* (film), 270

Kahn, Gustave, 108
Kaiser, Georg, 239
Kazin, Alfred, 16, 246n4, 248n19
Keats, John, 108
Kenner, Hugh, 6–7, 162
Kipling, Rudyard, 76

Labour Party, 97, 98
Lawrence, D. H., 22, 179; *A Collier's Friday Night*, 182; *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, 180; "The Future of the Novel," 179–80; *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* 189–91; "Pan in America," 186–87, 196n52; *The Plumed Serpent*, 188–89; "The Proper Study," 179, 180–81; *Sea and Sardinia*, 192n8; *St. Mawr*, 188; *Study of Thomas Hardy*, 182, 194n24; and Swinburne, 180–82, 184, 188, 190; *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, 190
legacy of decadence in modernism, 161, 163, 165, 176–77, 230, 245
Le Gallienne, Richard, 4, 81, 84–85
Leonard, Leola: review of *Sonnets from the Patagonian* (Evans), 207–8, *208*
lesbianism, 15, 76, 128, 138–39, 148, 182, 242
Leverson, Ada, 20; *Bird of Paradise*, 33, 35, 36; and decadent men, 30–31; and feminism, 28, 32; feminist subversion of decadence, 29; "Free Verse," 37; "Gentlemen v. Players: A Critic Match," 37–38, 44n55; "The Last First Night," 38–39; *Letters to the Sphinx from Oscar Wilde with Reminiscences of the Author*, 42, 44n55; *The Limit*, 34–35; linked fin de siècle and modernism, 27–28, 32, 36–39, 42; *Love at Second Sight*, 27, 33, 36–37; *Love's Shadow*, 33, 34; and marriage, 32–35; marriage in novels of, 33–35; "The Quest of Sorrow," 30; and the Sitwells, 39–40; "Suggestion," 29–30; *Tenterhooks*, 33; *The Twelfth Hour*, 31–32, 34, 36; and Wilde, 20, 29, 30–31, 34, 42
Leverson, Ernest, 32–33
Levin, Harry, 6
Levy, Amy, 101; "Magdalen," 101–2
Lewis, Wyndham, 7, 172–73, 229, 230, 245, 248n19; and Leverson, 39, 40–42; "The Wild Body," 172
linguistic consciousness, drama of, 173–75
linguistic drift in Firbank, 124–25, 126–27
linguistic mechanism, 173–74, 175–76
literary criticism, modernist, 120, 161–62
Literature and Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence (Mahoney), 8, 80, 220n10, 226n74
Little Review, 17, 19
Locke, Alain, 254, 255, 266–68, 274n80
London: decadents in, 5, 13, 73, 233
London Stage Society, 60–61
Lowell, Amy, 212
Lowell, Robert, 151, 155
Loy, Mina, 19
Lugné-Poe, Aurélien, 55–56, 57
Lunar Baedeker (Loy), 19

MacDonald, Ramsay: and Margaret Sackville, 97–98
Machen, Arthur, 11, 17, 184; *The Great God Pan*, 82; *The Hill of Dreams*, 75, 86n25, 181; on Wilde, 72
Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity (Kent), 228n86
Marinetti, F. T., 207
Marinoff, Fania, 201, 221n26, 233
masculinist modernism, 28
materialistic mode, 237, 238, 239
Maugham, W. S.: and Leverson, 38
McCarthy, Desmond: on *Salome*, 61
mechanical comedy, 172–73, 174, 175
mechanization, 173, 176
Memoirs of an Aesthete (Acton), 40
Mencken, H. L., 17, 243
Men of the Nineties (Muddiman), 77
Meynell, Alice, 99, 103, 104
militarism, 111, 112, 113

Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 21–22; alternative modernism of, 136–37, 154; *Aria da Capo*, 141–42; *The Buck in the Snow*, 138–39; *Conversation at Midnight*, 153–54; and decadence, 135, 139–41, 154–55; "Elegy," 139; and eroticism, 138–39; "Evening on Lesbos," 138–39; "Ever So Far from Here" (Baudelaire trans.), 150; *Fatal Interview*, 147, 148; feminist awareness of Baudelaire, 145–46; "First Fig," 135–36; *Les Fleurs du mal* (Baudelaire trans.), 144–45; "Interim," 139; "I will put Chaos into fourteen lines," 152; *The Lamp and the Bell*, 157n33; lesbian relationships of, 137; "Memorial to D. C.," 139; "Murdered Woman" (Baudelaire trans.), 146; "The Murder in the Fishing Cat," 141; "The Outraged Moon" (Baudelaire trans.), 150–51; "Singing Woman from the Wood's Edge," 140; "Spring," 138; vampirized Baudelaire, 145; violent fetishism in, 147–48; Wildean influence on, 141–42
minimalism in Wilde's theatrical staging, 51, 53
Mirbeau, Octave, 199, 235
misogyny, 28, 29, 230; in Baudelaire, 145, 148–49, 153; in Eliot, 5; in Huysmans, 257; and Sackville, 91–92; in Saki, 82; in Lewis, 41, 42
"modernism," etymology and use of, 162–63, 177n3
Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence (Sherry), 8, 120, 226n74, 228n93
modernisms, diversity of, 8
Moi, Toril, 54
moon: in "Autumn" (Hulme), 108; in *Salome*, 52, 53–54, 55
Moore, Thomas Sturge, 60, 61
Morrell, Lady Ottoline, 15
Munro, Hector Hugh. *See* Saki
Murry, John Middleton, 79; "Baudelaire and Decadence," 143
mythopoeia: Lawrence's, 183; Swinburne's, 191

narrative voice in Lawrence, 186, 189, 191
naturalism, 21, 48, 49, 53, 54
nature-humanity split, 186, 187; and gender division, 187, 188, 191
"naughtiness" and modernism, 22, 130, 215–18; and *Tender Buttons* (Stein), 227–28n86
New Criterion, 39, 45n62
new decadence, 11, 229–31, 234, 235, 239
Newmark, Maxim: review of *The Buck in the Snow* (Millay), 138–39
New Negro, The, 254
New Woman, 10, 20, 28, 98–99, 136, 146
New York, 16, 149–50, 153–54, 170, 199; decadent novel in, 22; "post-decadents" in, 232–33. *See also* Greenwich Village
New Yorker, 135
New York Times, 209
Ngai, Sianne: *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 214, 216; on *Tender Buttons* (Stein), 214, 216–17; *Ugly Feelings*, 48, 60, 67n4
Nichols, Beverley, 15
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 181, 182, 238
Niggerati, 254–55, 263, 268
Nightwood (Barnes), 18, 169, 176; pretense in, 170–71, 174–75
Nisard, Désiré, 4
No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (Edelman), 165
Norton, Allen, 210, 248n28; *The Convolvulus*, 199, 215, 222n34; *Saloon Sonnets*, 199–200, 215
Norton, Louise, 199, 200, 210, 233; *Little Wax Candle*, 199, 203, 216
"Notes on 'Camp'" (Sontag), 19–20
Nugent, Richard Bruce, 23, *252*, 253–54, *261*, 269; on Alain Locke, 267–68; *Black Studies Primer*, *259*; *Drawings for Mulattoes*, 258; as the "gay rebel," 23, 253, 254; *Geisha Man*, 264; *Gentleman Jigger*, 251, 264–65; and homosexuality, 252–53, 260–61; influence of Beardsley on, 258; "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," 255–58, 259–60, 266, 270. *See also* embodiment in Nugent
nympholepsy, 22, 179, 184–85, 186–87, 189, 190

objective/subjective, 182
Odle, Alan, 37, 44n51
ortolans, 72, 85n4

Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, 203

paganism, 17, 76, 90; and Lawrence, 184–85, 187; in Sackville's poetry, 100
Pan, 22, 100, 184, 185–87, 188–89, 190
Paris, 1, 4, 18, 49, 55, 149–50
Parisian decadence, 4, 73, 78, 79, 141, 167
Parker, Dorothy, 154, 160n101
Patagonians, 200–201, 207, 210, 226n74, 227n84
Pater, Walter, 2, 5, 11, 19, 77, 90, 135, 183; "Apollo in Picardy," 4; biographies of, 3–4; *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, 5, 183
Patience (Gilbert and Sullivan), 42
Pemberton-Billing trial, 13
personal, the: and Millay, 136–37, 144, 154; in poetry, 111
Phillips, Stephen, 75–76
Picture of Dorian Gray, The (Wilde), 71, 72–73, 77, 172; and *The Blind Bow-Boy* (Van Vechten), 236, 238; and Nugent, 251, 255–56; preface to, 265; realism and idealism in, 53
Pierrot, 80, 141–42, 154
Pigott, Edward F. S.: banned *Salome*, 50–51
Plarr, Victor, 5–6
Poe, Edgar Allan, 125, 140
Poètes d'aujourd'hui, 108
poetic form, 137, 151–52, 154, 159n87
poetry, recitation, 91, 110–11
Poetry and Drama, 91, 93
Poetry Recital Society, 91, 110
Poetry Review, 75–76
Poetry Society, 110–11
Poets' Club, the, 91; meetings of, 106, 108; press derision of, 105–6; publications of, 106–7, 109
poison, decadence as, 74, 77, 85–86n19
polyvocalism in Millay, 145
Pope, Alexander, 180
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, A (Joyce), 166–67
Post Card, The (Derrida), 125
post-structuralism, 125
post-Victorian decadents, 11, 80, 220n10; in Leverson, 20, 28, 31, 32
Pound, Ezra, 5–6, 7, 9, 229; *A Lume Spento*, 5; "The Decadence," 5; and the Poets' Club, 109
Pound Era, The (Kenner), 6–7
Pre-Raphaelites, 135, 140
promiscuity, 17, 136, 233
prostitutes, 17, 101, 124, 274n79
Punch (magazine), 29, 34, 78
Put Out More Flags (Waugh), 15

queer literature, 12, 14, 16; in America, 18–19, 22–23; and Firbank, 121–24, 230
queerness, 164–65, 231; and decadence, 245; double meaning of, 230, 240–41; in Nugent, 260, 266; in Van Vechten, 235, 240, 241, 243–44, 246
queer poetics, 16, 19

Rainey, Lawrence: on modernism, 199
realism, 11, 21, 49, 53, 53–54, 127, 238
Rhymers' Club, 3, 84, 106
Richards, Grant, 39
Ricketts, Charles, 3, 13, 44n55; and *Salome*, 51, 60–62
Rire (*Laughter*) (Bergson), 172, 178n23
Rogers, Robert Emons: review of *Tender Buttons* (Stein), 205–6
Rogue (magazine), 18, 19, 200, 201, 210, 215
Rolfe, Frederick William. *See* Corvo, Baron
Romantic '90s, The (Le Gallienne), 4
Romantic individualism, 10, 12
Romanticism, 3, 4, 184
Ross, Robert, 106; on *Salome*, 65–66
Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (Edward Fitzgerald), 81, 138
Ruling Passion, The (Lane), 123

Sackville, Margaret, 21, 89, 113–14; appearance and photographs, 92–93, *94*, *95*; "Ballade of the Journey's End," 107; *Book of Verse by Living Women*, 102–5; "Fallen," 101, 102; and the Great War, 111–13; "Hymn to Dionysus," 90; as nobility, 92; "Nostra Culpa," 112–13; "Ode to Aphrodite," 107; *The Pageant of War*, 112–13; and the Poetry (Recital) Society, 110–11; and the Poets' Club, 106–7, 109; "The Princess' Song," 107; "Reconciliation," 113; relationships with men, 96–98;

Sackville, Margaret (*continued*)
"Unrest," 100, *101*; "The Wanderer," 107; "Women and Poetry," 98, 99–100
Saki, 21, 81–83; *The Chronicles of Clovis*, 82; "Gabriel-Ernest," 82, 83; "Tobermory," 83
Salome (Strauss), 49, 62–64; aesthetic rupture in, 64
Salome (Wilde), 3, 20–21, 47–48, 258; aesthetic rupture in, 60, 61, 67; banning of, 50–51; irreconcilability in, 54; and modernism, 48–49; and Nugent, 258; premiere of, 55–56; productions of, 57–59, 61–62, 66–67; Salome's monologue in, 47, 48, 54, 66; things ("choses") in, 52–53, 54, 64
Salome, prop head of Iokanaan in, 20–21, 47–48, 49–50, 53, 54; in Farr's production, 58–59; necessity for, 65; at the premiere, 55–56; replacement and omission of, 66–67; in Ricketts's production, 62; in Strauss's opera, 63, 64
"Salome, Simile, *Symboliste*" (Hanson), 54
Salome's Modernity (Dierkes-Thrun), 48
Saltus, Edgar, 16, 64
Sappho, 107, 137, 139, 148
satire, 15
self-image, 20
self-indulgence, 84, 99
Sexton, Anne, 155, 160n101
sexual identity, 12, 14, 15, 20, 231, 243–44, 251
sexuality, 17, 245; female, in Sackville's poetry, 90, 100–101, 102; and feminism, 136; interracial, 259, 260, 270; in Lawrence, 189–90, 191; and Leverson, 31; Millay's, 137; non-normative, 9, 12, 14–15; and paganism, 185, 186; and sexual deviance in *Salome*, 51, 64; transgressive, 76, 231, 233, 243–44. *See also* homoeroticism; homosexuality; lesbianism
Sitwell, Edith, 39; *Façade*, 39, 45n65
Sitwell, Osbert, 39–40, 41; *"Almanac des Singes,"* 41; *Noble Essences*, 40
Sketches in Italy and Greece (Symonds), 184–85
social mores, 83, 105
Socrates, 72–73
Sontag, Susan, 19–20, 247n11
Sphinx, The (Wilde), 3
"Sphinx of Modern Life." *See* Leverson, Ada
Stein, Gertrude: accused of fakery, 211, 226n66; *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 201–2, 216; on *The Blind Bow-Boy* (Van Vechten), 240; influence on Evans, 207, 209, 213; "Miss Furr and Miss Skene," 241; *Tender Buttons*, 22, 201–2, 203–5, 210, 211, 214, 215–16, 218
Stevens, Wallace, 19, 200, 213, 233
Stonewall Inn riots, 269
Strindberg, August, 55
Strindberg, Frida, 73
style, decadent, 7, 10–11, 126, 234
subjectivity, 78, 84, 172, 182, 185–86, 238
suffragettes, 28, 32, 91, 98
Swinburne, Algernon, 1, 11, 22, 76, 77, 179, 191; "The Garden of Proserpine," 180; "The Lake of Gaube," 185; Lawrence on, 182–83, 194n24; modernists' attitudes toward, 181–82; and mythopoeia, 183; "A Nympholept," 185–86; *Songs before Sunrise*, 190
symbolism, 48, 49–50, 53, 108; and decadence, 2–3, 21, 54, 84; and modernism, 245
symbolist theater, 55, 57, 60
Symons, A. J. A., 3, 13
Symons, Arthur, 9, 169; "The Decadent Movement in Literature," 2; Pound on, 6; reviews of Millay, 140–41; *Spiritual Adventures*, 75; *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 2–3; translation of Baudelaire, 143, 157n40
Syrinx: Pastels of Hellas (Buck), 200

Tancred, F. C., 109
This Side of Paradise (F. Scott Fitzgerald), 16
Three Soldiers (Dos Passos), 12, 24n27
Thurman, Wallace, 261–63, 265–66; as fictionalized in *Gentleman Jigger*, 264–65; *Infants of the Spring*, 262–64, 268–69
TLS (*Times Literary Supplement*), 86n21; hostility to decadence, 74–75, 77–78; on Leverson, 27; review of *The Flute of Sardonyx* (John), 75–77; review of *Seven Men* (Beerbohm), 80

"To a Fat Lady Seen from a Train" (Cornford), 104–5
transformation in Lawrence, 180–81
Travers, Rosalind, 104
Twelfth Hour, The (Leverson), 31–32, 34, 36
twentieth-century decadence, 8–9, 20–24; difficulties of defining, 11–12
twentieth-century literary history's dismissal of decadence, 2–3
twentieth-century theater and *Salome*, 49, 51, 55, 56–58

Ulysses (Joyce), 14, 166, 167–69, 239
"Unrest" (Sackville), 100, *101*
Uranianism, 14, 76

"values," deterioration of: and decadence, 10
Van Vechten, Carl, 22–23, 200, 229, 231, *232*; and camp, 230–31; and Evans, 201, 221n26; and fin de siècle, 232; on Firbank, 120; and homosexuality, 241; and new decadence, 230, 232–33, 234–36, 245; *Peter Whiffle*, 233; and sexuality, 233; on Stein and Evans, 206–7; Wildean influence on, 235, 238, 241. See also *Blind Bow-Boy, The* (Van Vechten)
ventriloquism in Millay and Baudelaire, 142, 145, 147, 148
Verhaeren, Emile, 108
verse forms: innovative, 154; traditional, 151–52, 159n87
vers libre. *See* free verse
"The Vision of Salome" (Allan), 49, 65, *66*

Wall Street Crash, 3, 16
"War and Literature" (Gosse), 3
Ward, Mary Augusta, 99
Waste Land, The (Eliot), 5, 138, 144
Waugh, Evelyn, 15
Weir, David, 7, 16
Westminster Gazette, 82
Whitman, Walt, 267
Wilde, Oscar, 77, 81, 86n19, 120, 207, 230, 263; on art, 106; and Baudelaire, 143; boys and, 13; and camp, 20; critique of late Victorian realism, 53; and Evans, 206, 207; influence of, 13, 15, 18, 23, 71–72, 197; and Lawrence, 180; and legacy of decadence, 120–21, 213; and Leverson, 20, 29, 30–31, 34, 42, 192n8; and Millay, 137, 141–42; and Nugent, 252, 253, 255–56, 262, 269; parallels with Socrates, 10, 72–73, 85n11; popularity during Great War, 13; and Saki, 81, 82; style of, 10, 31–32; and theater, 50, 51, 54–55, 60, 65–66; tomb of, 1; tour of America, 42; trials and imprisonment of, 71–73, 74, 82, 84, 137, 269; and Van Vechten, 235, 238, 241; and Whistler, 265. *See also individual works by title*
Wildean aesthetic, 72; in Leverson's novels, 31–32; in Saki, 81–82
Wilson, Edmund, 47–48, 119, 147, 154; on new decadence, 235–36
Womanhood (periodical), 98–99; Sackville's poems in, 100–102
women and decadence, 29
women poets, 102–5
Women Writers' Dinner, 99
Woolf, Virginia, 39, 161, 237, 238; and decadence, 165–66, 169; review of *Seven Men* (Beerbohm), 80; *The Voyage Out*, 163–65
World War I. *See* Great War
Wyndham, Violet, 42

Yeats, W. B., 56, 69n44, 79, 168, 183; *The Celtic Twilight*, 140; on the end of decadence, 73; on Sackville, 113; on *Salome*, 58; *The Trembling of the Veil*, 4
Yellow Book, The, 13, 80, 209, 212, 213; Leverson's stories in, 20, 27, 29–30